TheVillage

www.thevillage.co

Issue #234 May 2023

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

OUR PLAN
FOR BROMSGROVE'S VILLAGES

1 Keeping rural areas connected and protected

We are committed to keeping our rural areas connected and protected. While broadband connectivity has improved, we will continue to address any gaps in provision and work with providers to improve mobile signal reception. We will also work closely with partners to tackle cross-border crime.

2 Connecting communities young and old

We believe in building strong communities that support both young and old. We will continue to invest in youth provision across the district, as well as enabling dementia care cafes and other services to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Our use of the world-leading 'Asset-based Community Development' (ABCD) approach underpins our efforts, enabling access to prevention-led services.

3 Backing our creative sector and The Artrix

We are proud to have secured over £600,000 investment to help decarbonise The Artrix. Working closely with the Holding Trust, we will help them develop a clear business case to enhance and secure our creative sector offer across the district.

4 Upgrading our transport and tackling traffic

Through engaging with Worcestershire County Council, we have commissioned a strategic transport assessment for Bromsgrove and beyond. Our upgrades to the A38 will improve congestion and traffic flow, while our Demand Responsive buses have already started and will be expanded. We have restored bus services to the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham, now including Sunday running.

5 Improving our town centres and high streets

Following the appointment of a dedicated town centres manager, we have adopted a strategy for our eight commercial centres across the district. Our investment of over £16 million in regenerating Bromsgrove Town Centre will act as a catalyst for inward investment and job creation.

6 Making our area cleaner and greener

Our efforts include tackling fly-tipping and prosecuting the worst offenders. We will also deliver more electric car charging points across the district and examine opportunities around hydrogen.

#EvenBetter4Bromsgrove

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TheVillage Issue 234 May 2023

inside

Bringing you village life for almost 25 years

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Front cover: Spring primulas in bloom, by *Village* reader Dennis Brown, of Hopwood.

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THE 'GREEN BELT VOTE'

THIS MONTH'S local elections could play a major role in deciding how *The Village* area looks in 20 years' time – and keep the threat of "Barntchurch"-style developments at bay.

It hinges on whether the Conservatives can hang on to control at Bromsgrove District Council, after only just scraping in by a handful of votes four years ago.

The district-wide Local Plan review, linked to an anticipated redrawing of Green Belt boundaries, was supposed to have been made public by now, but was postponed last autumn.

The suspicion in some quarters was it was delayed because the proposals would prove unpopular with Bromsgrove's voters – especially coupled with the current negative sentiment towards Conservatives nationally.

The hope of independent candidates standing in the elections is that they can hold the balance of power at Bromsgrove after May 4.

Without an overall majority, the plans can't just be voted through by Tory councillors "whipped" to vote with the party's wishes.

DESPITE voter fraud being vanishingly rare in the UK, the Government has introduced a requirement to prove who you are at the polling station with a form of photographic ID, such as a passport or photo driving licence – you can check at www.gov.uk for acceptable photo identification cards. Documents such as student ID cards and bank statements are not acceptable and it is now too late to apply for a "Voter Authority Certificate", leading to fears of frustration and even confrontation at polling stations.

Under the Conservative group at Bromsgrove, the "Barntchurch" report – contemplating the creation of a garden town of 10-15,000 homes on Green Belt land between Alvechurch and Barnt Green – is still considered part of "Planning Policies and Other Planning Information" by the council.

Charlie Hotham, independent district councillor for the Barnt Green and Hopwood ward for the past eight years, told *The Village*: "We must remember that this is the administration that voted to support the housing calculation that would have doubled our requirement from around 369 to 750 homes per year. Thank goodness other Conservative councils rejected the proposal.

"I do worry that the plan they have been working on will be voted through using their whip. Only on three occasions in the past four years has a member of one of the two major parties voted against or abstained on anything their leader supports."

Coun Hotham said the Green Belt review was needed to identify the pockets of land that no longer needed to remain within it.

"These areas should be prioritised for affordable homes as this is what we need. We can't say, 'that's it, we are building no more houses,' because local people working locally need them, but Barntchurch-type developments, would be completely unacceptable," added Coun Hotham.

May the 4th be with you! **Find out who wants your vote on Pages 30-37**

Banned BBQ bench blaze 'defies belief'

DESPITE the fire devastation caused last summer in the Lickey Hills Country Park, further evidence of selfish vandalism greeted the park rangers early one April morning, writes *Keith Woolford*.

An illegal barbecue left a picnic bench, which had been donated by The Lickey Hills Society, completely destroyed. The fire was so severe that the only remains were the four disposable BBQ grills which had been left to burn by the careless visitors.

The heat generated also left the Tarmac still smoking several hours after the clear-up by the park rangers.

Ash remains: **All that was left of the park bench after the fire.**

One member of The Lickey Hills Society said: "It defies belief that these people should treat this great amenity and its visitors with such contempt. Sneaking in after the car park was closed, lighting these disposable BBQs when anyone with an ounce of common sense knows the terrible damage they can inflict particularly as they are banned from the park with good reason."

The rangers urged visitors to follow the rules of the park so everyone could enjoy this wonderful area.

Park hands out 24,000 poo bags in one year

A DOG poo bag dispenser in a village park has provided 24,000 bags in just one year, Barnt Green Parish Council heard.

The dispenser at Bittell Road playing fields contains bags that villagers can take for free to use while exercising their dogs in the park – although it is suspected that people are taking them to use elsewhere.

Hearing that the cost was around £800, parish councillor Charlie Hotham said: "It seems like good value for money because we don't see a lot of dog mess around Barnt Green."

He later added: "Even if the bags are being used outside Barnt Green, what a contribution to dog mess removal for the locality. I doubt people are taking them for any other purpose."

Larder needs storage space

THE ALVECHURCH Larder is appealing for storage space in the village as demand for its services grows.

A spokesman told *The Village*: "As the larder has grown in numbers, we now have over 40 customers supporting the reduction in food waste weekly and have been visited by almost 200 parish families in total.

"We are supplying more food and we have run out of storage space. If anyone is able to help with storage then we would be extremely grateful.

"An empty garage, or redundant hard-standing where we could put a shed would be great.

"We would need access during the day on weekdays by a limited number of volunteers. Ideally it would be fairly close to our base at the Baptist Church but would consider any offer."

PEOPLE POWER: When gas supplier Cadent announced that it was next in line to dig up the most dug-up road in the district, villagers went directly to the company to ask for a 'mitigation strategy'.

Within days of Alan Bailes, of residents' group Bordesley Matters, meeting the project manager a number of signs, including those pictured above, were in place on the infamous stretch of Birmingham Road, and contact phone numbers provided. The work is expected to last at least 14 weeks.

The larder is also still looking for volunteers to help with a new Thursday evening session starting on June 1. Anyone able to help the larder with either matter can contact Keith on 07784 363 177.

Picnic in Park aiming high again

ALVECHURCH'S Picnic in the Park party is hoping to see another Battle of Britain flypast after the excitement created by a low-flying Lancaster bomber last year (below).

The plan this year is to see a Spitfire and a Hurricane passing over the event in The Meadows on Sunday May 28. For a round-up of plans for this year's event, including the popular Fun Dog Show, see Page 43.

Cheers to 18 years, Tony!

A PARISH councillor was thanked for his services with a large can of beer and an inscribed tankard as he stood down after 18 years.

The presentation was made to Tony Wallis, of Rowney Green, at the start of Alvechurch Parish Council's monthly meeting. Parish chairman Marc Worrall said: "Thank you for all the time you have devoted – 18 years is quite impressive."

Flood alert

A FLOOD-level marker post was due to be delivered to Barnt Green Parish Council by the end of April for installation under the railway bridge at the bottom of Hewell Lane, where vehicles have become stranded in flash-floodwater. "Just in time for the summer floods," said parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley.

Barnt no-Green

BARNT GREEN has "lost its sledging field", Coun Cholmondeley remarked after hearing the parish's application to designate the land between the village and the M42 footbridge a village green would not succeed.

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Words and pictures by Keith Woolford

Lickey litter champions

MANY hands made light work of a clear-up of rubbish and litter on the Lickey Hills.

Organised by The Lickey Hills Society, a party of volunteers descended on the Lickey Hills Country Park to assist in collecting discarded rubbish from this popular the beauty spot one Saturday morning.

Armed with litter pickers and waste bags, they spent a few bright, blue-skied hours assisting the park rangers in their ongoing attempts at removing litter left by thoughtless visitors.

Much of the rubbish collected included drink cans, sweet papers and, unusually, a commercial catering size cylinder of nitrous oxide, all within 100 metres of the Visitor Centre.

Event organiser Jill Harvey, of The Lickey Hills Society, was most appreciate of the volunteers who turnout on a Saturday. She said: "We have been supporting the country park for many years now and this is one of two litter picks we hold each year. It helps enhance this wonderful amenity for everyone to enjoy."

Triumphant volunteers: From The Lickey Hills Society, cheer to a job well done, with their litter pickers.

Jill went on to ask that visitors think about using the bins provided or take home their own rubbish rather than leaving it behind: "The safety of those using the park, particular the young and vulnerable, is of paramount importance."

For those interested in joining next time, the autumn litter pick will take place on Saturday 7 October at 10am. Meet at the Visitor Centre on Warren Lane, Lickey.

AN AFTERNOON treat for village mothers was held at the new Cofton Village Hall, when The Redditch Orchestra captivated guests with a broad programme of classical music. Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* welcomed everyone as they took their seats.

Apart from a selection from *Iolanthe* by Gilbert & Sullivan, the first movement of a Beethoven symphony, a particular highlight had orchestra leader Graham Longfils performing solo violin having unearthed 'Violin Concerto No.9' by the little heard Charles-Auguste de Bériot, an often overlooked composer.

The amateur orchestra, which boasts around 30 regular members, is one of the oldest in the county having been founded in 1948. Their present conductor Samuel Lellouch, is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham.

The curtain was brought down, when the popular *Redetzky March* by Johann Strauss had everyone clapping and swaying together.

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WEIGHBRIDGE WINS AGAIN

VILLAGE canalside pub *The Weighbridge*, has been awarded CAMRA Pub of the Year for Bromsgrove and Redditch, following their win of CAMRA's Pub of the Season award in 2022.

Chris Lamb, who took over the running of The Weighbridge in November 2021, said they were delighted with the award: "The pub has always been a huge part of my life. I grew up here."

Chris, who worked at The Weighbridge when he was younger before joining the police force, and then becoming a housing officer, told *The Village* that something always brought him back to the pub, and he found himself occasionally taking up his old position behind the bar to help out, and during beer festivals.

Chris and his wife Laura, had discussed the possibility of running a pub as a "retirement dream, maybe in the future" so was thrilled to have the opportunity to take on The Weighbridge when the previous landlords offered him the chance.

Paul Richards, CAMRA chairman of the branch for Bromsgrove and Redditch, praised the pub and the work they had done, and presented Chris, Caroline and the team with the award on 6 April. The pub was characteristically overflowing with real ale, morris groups and villagers enjoying a good food and drink.

Chuffed: Paul Richards (left) of CAMRA awards Chris Lamb and Caroline Spreckley 'Bromsgrove & Redditch Pub of the Year'.

Chris has big plans for The Weighbridge, with two awards already under his belt, his sights are now set on the next CAMRA award; County Pub of the Year where The Weighbridge will be competing against award-winning pubs from Evesham, Droitwich and further afield.

Chris said in the short time he'd been at The Weighbridge, they had needed to update and fix many things around the pub including glasswashers and a marquee, and added: "We've got a beer festival coming up in May, loads of other events. We love doing them and love people coming to them. It's one of the best things in the world seeing people enjoying them.

In addition to what we've added to last year's beer festivals we're also adding a local beer section with another 10 casks of ale, that are all going to be specials from local breweries."

He went on to thank the team at the pub for their hard work and support, the regular visitors and local groups who support The Weighbridge, and CAMRA for their ongoing support of the pub, and making him feel "reassured that he might know what he's doing".

Since taking over, Chris and the team have been working hard making changes, including their new opening hours. The Weighbridge is now open all day Thursday-Sunday.

For those who have never been to The Weighbridge before, Chris said; "It's a place for people to come together. And for those who want to try real ale and chat about breweries, I'm always more than happy to talk about what to try and where to go."

The Weighbridge Inn, Alvechurch

Beer Festival

19TH & 20TH MAY

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12-11 PM

45 REAL ALES 18 CIDERS 6 CRAFT BEERS GIN BAR

ALVECHURCH MARINA, B48 7SQ

A village or a hamlet?

Dear Editor – Is somebody able to shed some light on why the Bordesley signs have been replaced with "Bordesley Village" ones (pictured below)? According to *National Archives* "A village will always have a church, whereas a hamlet is usually defined as a small, isolated group of houses without a church."

Interestingly, there is an article outlining how a planning application for a location for a "limited infilling" was unsuccessful based on the fact that the existing settlement was deemed to be a hamlet rather than village due to the lack of church and as such the Green Belt exemption for "limited infilling" in villages did not apply. Based on the information from both sources above, Bordesley is not a village but a hamlet.

Could somebody with an interest in creating a new development within Bordesley be employing *fait accompli* tactics for a future planning application?

Regardless of the answer to that question, the signs should be factual and if Bordesley is not a village, they should not be implying it is.

Concerned Bordesley

Independents' day

Dear Editor – There is an alternative if residents are fed up, like us, with the same old party politics playing out and that is by keeping Alvechurch South, Alvechurch Village and Barnt Green and Hopwood independent. At the last district council election, the residents in our area voted for the independent candidates standing in their wards.

We need to do the same again. Annette English (Alvechurch South), Kate Van Der Plank (Alvechurch Village) and Charlie Hotham (Barnt Green and Hopwood) have worked tirelessly over the last four years and current independent candidates pledge to continue the hard work and dedication they have put into their wards.

As an independent candidate, the core belief is to generate partnerships with local people so that together we can create the right solutions to local problems. All the independent candidates live in the community and fully understand first-hand the issues facing residents.

Only by understanding the local concerns and by working together can we get a better deal for residents.

The independents are not members of political parties and not interested in party rhetoric; they are more interested in seeking your views and working with you to get the right improvement for our area.

As an independent we do not have to follow any party policies or manifestos. We are here to vote in a way that maintains our integrity and by being truly independent in a way that supports and benefits the area in which we live.

The independents are keen to hold the council into account by becoming more transparent through better public involvement in local decisions – which appears to be lacking at present. We are here to ensure that essential services and infrastructure are delivered when promised.

Contrary to the rumours that have been posted by the main political parties – that the independents are not truly independent as they have their own agendas – our only agenda is one set by you the residents of Alvechurch, Beoley, Bordesley, Hopwood, Portway and Rowney Green.

On the 4th May vote for a strong independent voice and a candidate who lives in the area.

The independent candidates for Alvechurch South and Alvechurch Village wards

PS: Do not forget to take your photo ID, which is now required to vote, to the polling station.

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk
or write to: Letters, The Village, The Limes, Swan Street, Alvechurch B48 7RR

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is May 10th 2023.

WHERE'S VINNY?

GETHIN HUGHES, aged seven is pictured with his sister Leri aged nine, from Finstall, both pupils at Charford First School. Gethin shows off the Mini Vinny he won in April's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*. Gethin's Vinny is the second to join the family as Leri also won a Vinny in 2019.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email or post – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on May 6 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

Thank you, Cofton

Dear Editor – Firstly I would like to thank the residents of Cofton Hackett (and Lickey) for allowing me the honour of representing them as their district councillor for over 30 years.

I have been lucky enough to raise a family and have businesses within the heart of the village and the support from local residents through the years has been so deeply appreciated.

We have seen many changes to our district and have conquered many challenges. Having only recently met Anita Dale (the new Conservative candidate for Cofton) she seems very capable and enthusiastic and I would like to wish her success should she be lucky enough to represent such an amazing community.

Once again, I thank you all.

Richard J Deeming, Cofton Hackett

Dear deer

Dear Editor – We always look foward to *The Village* and enjoy the pictures of animals and nature. We thought you may like to see the family of deer that visit our garden.

We believe it is mum, dad and a young one. The young one (pictured overleaf) seems to be getting more confident and today was feasting on our plants.

I would love to let everyone see the young deer that frequent our beautiful countryside.

Steve Bangham, Marlbrook

continues overleaf

continues from previous page

Regular garden visitors: One member of a family of deer, photographed by villager Steve Bangham in his back garden.

Absolutely stumped

Dear Editor – I'm hoping that your contributor Mary Green can throw some light on to the destruction over the last year of an old tree stump on Old Rectory Lane, Alvechurch.

I include two pictures (below) of the said stump taken a year apart, in April last year and April this year. The damage is obvious, I'm assuming it may be the work of badgers?

I would like the opinion of Mary, as I'm sure anyone else who has passed the tree stump and wondered what has caused the damage.

Terry Louch, Bromsgrove

20 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

THE COVER of the May 2003 issue of *The Village*, featured "Backlit Beech" by Marion Pross, an Alvechurch personnel manager and photography enthusiast who had been picking up tips at a workshop by Lickey photographer Jo Cound.

SCHOOL CONCERNS

VILLAGERS were urging the local education authority to let them have a say on plans for new schools in Alvechurch. News of the £60 million privaate finance initiative came as a surprise to the Alvechurch Annual Parish Meeting, where parish clerk Gill Lungley said: "The issue raises very many questions, such as are they going to build on the current site, or are they going to build on a new site and sell this on? We want to be part of the process."

RIDING THE BOOM

ESTATE agent Darren Blower told readers how Alvechurch had been transformed from a village seen as being "down at heel" into one where the property market had blossomed. "It just needed someone to give it a lift and point out the virtues," Darren told *The Village* as he launched a new office in Barnt Green.

STEVE DAVIS (centre) who won gym membership at the Abbey Hotel, Bordesley in a silent auction in aid of the Midland Sinfonia, tries out the facilities with Abbey general manager John Hindson (left) and Sinfonia fundraiser Keith Woolford.

10 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

A BRIGHTLY coloured tulip blooms on the cover of our May 2013 issue, marking the arrival of spring. The image was taken by Dennis Brown, of Hopwood.

THE BIG LUNCH

FOLLOWING a successful big spring bank holiday party in the park in Alvechurch to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee, organsers set to work preparing for another event.

You might recognise the event as it exists now, as Picnic in the Park, but in 2013 the event was planned under the name The Big Lunch, an event for communities from across the villages, held in The Meadows and at Alvechurch Cricket Club.

A competition was held by Crown Meadow First School to design a logo for the event. Pictured right is student Millie Guy showing off her winning design of a picnic hamper of food.

JIMMY AND JOHN, of Peter's Pan fish and chip shop in Barnt Green pose with their latest award.

The popular takeaway was celebrating second place in the "Best Chippy Chips" Award during National Chip Week in 2013 – out of 500 chip shops across the Midlands!

The award was voted for by happy customers and the shop also received a visit from a mystery customer.

Alvechurch Parish Council
serving Alvechurch, Bordesley, Hopwood, Rowney Green and Weatheroak

Parish news

Synopsis of the Chairman's Annual Report for 2022–23

Last year, having seen the last of the Covid restrictions, we find ourselves now facing a new challenge. This is the cost of living increases we are all experiencing and the inevitable effect this will have on all residents in our Parish, some more than others. With this in mind, it came as no surprise that, once again, the public spirit we enjoy in our Parish was to be seen with the initiative to form a weekly Community Larder based in the Baptist Church. I'm pleased that the Parish Council was asked and played an instrumental part in the early days of setting up this worthy venture with advice and financial support.

Sale of APC's Gravel Pit in Rowney Green

Following an approach to the Council to purchase the Gravel Pit the Council resolved to invite offers, accompanied by a detailed explanation of the intended use of the Gravel Pit by any future owner, to base any decision it made on the disposal of it. After an open market selling exercise, which resulted in three formal offers being submitted to the Council, a group of Councillors were tasked with interviewing potential owners and assessing their submissions following an explanation for their intended use for the Gravel Pit. After much debate and a close vote, it was agreed that in the best interests of all Parish residents to sell the Gravel Pit to a private party based on their intended use and financial offer made. The resulting monies raised have been added to the Council's reserves with the intention of having them 'earmarked' for the acquisition of a permanent or additional site for allotments.

Rowney Green Pavillion and Playing Fields

Following an approach by the Trustees of Rowney Green Village Hall (RGVH), after much debate amongst Councillors, it was agreed to give a 15-year lease to the RGVH Trustees for the Council's Rowney Green (RG) playing fields and pavilion. The Parish Council recognised that the Trust was in a far better position to apply for grant funding from sources the Parish Council can't access to help fund improvements.

Have your say

Alvechurch Parish Council are keen to receive your comments or queries; do please contact the Parish Office if you wish to discuss any matter.

Pathway Lighting Upgrade

The long-awaited upgrade of the 136 pathway lighting columns and lanterns has taken place over the course of the last year. Following a comprehensive tender process and evaluation of the quotes received, the Council obtained a Public Works loan and instructed a specialist contractor to undertake the work. The upgrade has almost been completed and those few lights still to be addressed have specific technical reasons needing to be resolved first. In addition, initial indications are that a significant saving on the energy consumed and billed will result from the upgrade.

Cllr Marc Worrall
Chairman APC 2022–2023

As our Footway Lighting Project nears completion, we are now keen to hear from any residents who feel additional footway lighting columns are required; do please contact the Parish Office and let us know the exact location and we will endeavour to consider your suggestion as/when funds allow.

Draft Accounts - subject to Audit

Balance sheet

	Year ended 31 Mar 2022 £	Year ended 31 Mar 2023 £
Current Assets		
Stocks and stores	–	–
Work in progress	–	–
Debtors (net provision for doubtful debts)	–	–
Prepayments	–	–
VAT recoverable	5,054.57	22,867.20
Temporary lendings	–	–
Cash in hand	88,436,96	141,906.15
Total Assets	93,491.53	164,773.35
Current Liabilities		
Creditors	–	–
Net assets	93,491.53	164,773.35
Represented by		
General fund balance	16,125.25	39,957.17
Capital Earmarked adjustments	77,366.28	124,816.18
	93,491.53	164,773.35

UNAUDITED

Uncontested elections results – 4th May – Councillors in Alvechurch Parish

The Parish Council elections are uncontested as less than thirteen people put themselves forward for election. As a result, the following will represent the three Wards:

Alvechurch Village
Peter Freeman
Tony Williams
Keith Wiseman
Marc Worrall

Hopwood
Paul Edwards
Samantha Lewis

Rowney Green and Bordesley
Rachael Bailes
Stephen Hornsby

There are four vacancies for the Alvechurch Ward; if you are interested in being co-opted please contact the Clerk.

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What a load of rubbish!

IN April, families, couples and villagers joined a community litter pick organised by Alvechurch Village Society. Meeting in The Square in the village centre, the groups arrived ready to collect litter from around the village.

Mariea Clarke, who helped to organise the event, said: "It was very successful with lots of participation from children and their families. We also gave out certificates and treats to the family groups who took part.

"Alvechurch village centre is kept tidy mainly through the efforts of the parish council, so most of the rubbish collected on 16 April was from hedgerows along the main roads and a few litter black spots including The Meadows and the Muga."

Crown Meadow First School and Alvechurch Middle School helped to advertise the event to parents which Mariea credits for the number of volunteers who turned up to help.

The volunteers managed to fill more than ten rubbish bags of litter, and many took the litter they found home to dispose of themselves.

Happy to help: Volunteers made the litter pick possible.

Proud volunteers: Certificates were awarded to volunteers.

Collected around the village: Some of the bags of litter collected.

A full bag: Picking up litter next to a 'no litter' sign.

Musicians on show

THE sound of music rang out across Alvechurch, as The Midland Sinfonia held its 14th Young Musicians' Showcase at St. Laurence Church in March, *writes Keith Woolford.*

The free concert had a variety of works performed by children aged between nine and 16 years old, using a range of instruments. The children played pieces for the piano, violin, saxophone, oboe and sang.

Popular and well-known music by Morricone, Chopin, Brahms and Tchaikovsky were sprinkled with those by Elton John, Leonard Bernstein and Ella Fitzgerald. The performers were treated to a workshop held by TMS Artistic Director Shulah Oliver offering advice and tips before they took the stage.

The Midland Sinfonia chair, Marian Barwell, said "The wonderful response by the appreciative audience offered a level of confidence to our players not usually available outside a concert setting. The performers deserved the applause as do the teachers and parents for their encouragement".

Above: Yukon Li gives a vocal performance. **Left:** Players relax after the show.

The Village

Open day on the waters

BUILDING on the success of last year's "Open Day" around the Bittell Estate, Barnt Green Waters are pleased to announce the Estate is holding another Event on Saturday the 13th May, with the opportunity to experience sailing, subject to weather conditions, and walking the Estate which is all within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Barnt Green Waters Ltd is a publicly-registered non-profit making company whose sole function is to manage and maintain the Bittell Reservoirs Estate. It was formed in 1920 following the purchase of sections of land and the two small Arrow Pools from the Earl of Plymouth for £5,000 and was given the "Sporting Rights" in perpetuity.

The bulk of the area is occupied by three reservoirs, Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub, which feed both the Worcester & Birmingham Canal and the River Arrow. The estate includes a diversity of habitats, thus is designated as a SSSI.

The estate is home to a fishing club and a sailing club and is also used for a variety of other outdoor activities. The company, together with the two clubs, funded the building of a clubhouse overlooking Upper Bittell, which houses a large meeting room, changing facilities, a kitchen and bar – and also The Boathouse Venue.

The fishing club was established in 1888 and provides a wide range of fishing opportunities in an attractive and peaceful environment covering five stretches of water. Three of these, Lower Bittell, Mill Shrub and Upper Arrow are reserved for fly fishing and are stocked with trout. All three provide bank fishing and there are also boats on the two larger trout pools. The largest reservoir on the estate (Upper Bittell, 80 acres) is a coarse fishery with a large head of bream, roach and perch and provides excellent pike fishing in the autumn and winter months. The final pool, Lower Arrow, contains tench and carp, as well as bream, roach and perch.

Full members can fish in all five pools, while a separate annual membership is available for those who only wish to coarse fish. There are no day tickets available to the public, but members may invite guests to fish on payment of a small fee.

The sailing club (Est. 1918) is one of the premier sailing clubs in the West Midlands and membership is open to all categories. We are also an RYA Teaching Establishment, providing Junior Training courses from the age of 7, together with adult courses.

We feel sure that whether you are an experienced sailor, or a newcomer to the sport, you will gain a great deal should you decide to join us. Much of our activity is centred on racing but we also encourage informal sailing outside the racing programme.

Come and Meet Us

We would be pleased to welcome you to Upper Bittell on Saturday the 13th May, between 11am and 4pm, to meet up with the various sporting sections and activities, obtain the information you need first hand and the relevant direct points of contact to hopefully join us and take part in one or more of the above membership activities.

You are not limited to just dinghy sailing at the club, as we also have a sailboarding section, an expanding paddleboarding group and a small team of canoeists and kayakers.

The Birmingham, Running & Triathlon Club (BRATS) organises open water swimming at Upper Bittell for their members from May to September, to help them train for competitive swimming events.

Anyone interested in natural history and the countryside can join our Friends of Bittell section which gives access to the estate. The reservoirs are home to a range of wading birds and a stopping off point for many species of migrants, and this section includes the well-established Birdwatchers.

Within the estate, The Boathouse Venue – in the clubhouse – provides panoramic views across the tranquil 80 acres of Upper Bittell reservoir and offers a secluded venue to companies and voluntary organisations during the week for in-house training sessions, sales meetings and seminar facilities or, as a regular meeting point for a club or society.

At the weekend, The Boathouse Venue becomes an ideal location for wedding receptions, special anniversary or birthday lunches, evening events, or just family get-togethers.

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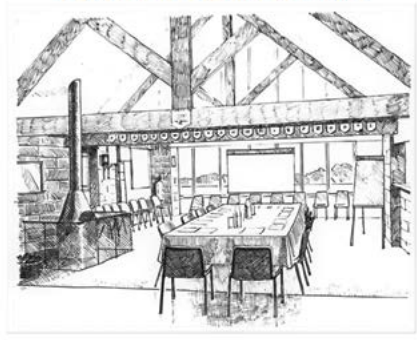

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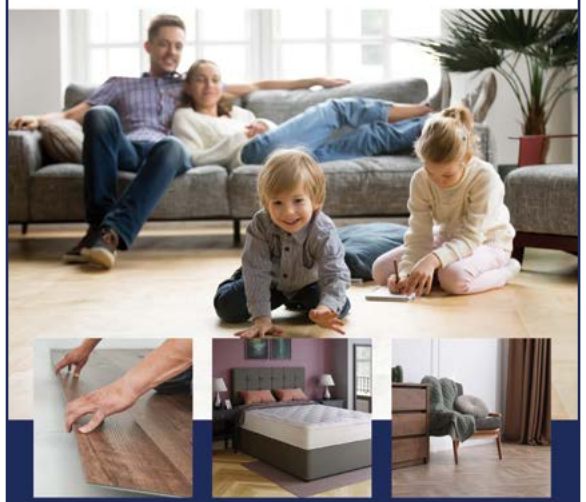

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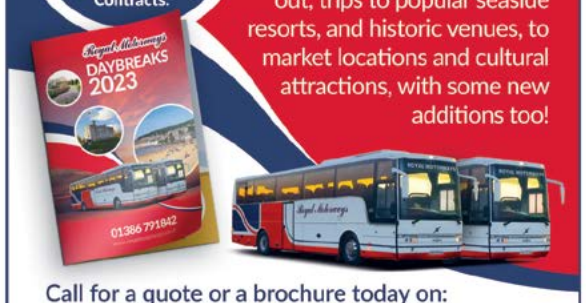

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Looking towards the sky at night

THERE was a welcome return to the Lickey Hills when the Birmingham Astronomical Society held an evening event in March. This was the first *Skywatch* event since the Covid pandemic, *writes Keith Woolford*.

Members of the society were on hand to answer questions and demonstrate their telescopes and binoculars. .

Three talks in the County Park School Room covered the constellation, our solar system, the planets and Barrie Paterson spoke about the extinction of the dinosaurs caused by an asteroid around 66 million years ago.

A general knowledge competition on space was won by Patrick Blunt from nearby Kings Heath who was presented with some goodies, by society member Ben Stanley.

Another Skywatch event is being planned for later in the year, which will be hosted once again by the rangers at the Lickey Hills Country Park Visitor Centre – hopefully there will be less cloud coverage during this event!

Winnings: Ben Stanley presents Patrick Blunt with his prizes.

Above: Victor Jenning with Daniel Lyons, his brother Ethan and mother Sarah.

Below: Lisa Wagstaff with son Callum O'Donoghue.

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A royal welcome to the orchard

TO celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, two new fruit trees have been planted in the Lickey Country Park, led by Park Ranger Penny Marriott.

The The Lickey Hills Society initiative saw the orchard welcome two new varieties, both apple. The first specimen was a *King Charles Permian* and the second a *May Queen*.

A member of the society said one of the trees held a particularly significant place in her heart following the recent loss of a dearly loved family member. In addition to being a delightful place to visit all year, the orchard is also used for the very popular annual Wassail held in January.

Planting for the King: Park Ranger Penny Marriott with helpers from the Lickey Hills Society. *Picture*/Keith Woolford

Tetyana's floral thank you

A BROMSGROVE refugee had to celebrate Easter away from home and family as the war continues in Ukraine, *writes Bob Jefford*.

Florist Tetyana Galenda lived in Ukraine's second city Kharkiv, about 50km from the eastern border with Russia. But she fled the bloodshed and is now staying with a host in Bromsgrove.

So this Easter, the 64-year-old grandmother used her skills to produce a floral centrepiece for celebrations at Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre, rather than selling bouquets from the Kharkiv flower shop she has run for 19 years.

Using a translation app, Tetyana explained that this year, her Easter is very different.

"Before the war, every year I baked Easter cakes and made cottage cheese. This is our tradition. We painted eggs and the whole family gathered for this great holiday. At my shop we also made a lot of bouquets for this holiday."

Spring blooms: Tetyana Galenda with her Easter floral creation.

But the shop is now closed, and Tetyana is constantly in fear for her aunt, sister and disabled brother who have remained in the place she still calls home.

"I am very worried for them," she added. "Every day I call them in the morning to find out if they are OK and how many times Kharkiv has been bombed and if my house has been hit with a rocket or shrapnel while they are in the place. I don't know how much more the house will stand from the rockets."

Tetyana is grateful for the local support she's received from Bromsgrove & Redditch Welcome Refugees (BRWR), which also provides weekly social get-togethers and English teaching for Ukrainian refugees.

"I am very thankful. I really like to learn English and all the teachers are lovely. I enjoy going to the classes," she said.

Tetyana now hopes to meet more of the estimated 100 Ukrainian refugees living in and around the Bromsgrove.

Tetyana enjoyed using her talents to help a Bromsgrove church celebrate Easter, but she longs for a return to normality.

"I am very grateful to England, and the people and the government. In general the people here are very kind, and the weather is good!" she concluded.

"But Ukraine is still my homeland and of course I am waiting for the war to end so I can go home."

The free support group meetings are held every Thursday morning between 10am – 12pm at the Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre on Stratford Road. There's no need to book. Further information from sandiejefford@gmail.com or info@brwr.uk

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DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE

This month, Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs discuss anxiety and how it can be managed, highlighting treatment for women in the early stages of menopause.

Supporting with care: Dr Heidi Kerr (left) and Dr Vicky Hobbs (right) are here to provide support and care for all aspects of women's health.

MAY is a month when we should all feel good knowing that summer is just around the corner. But not everyone feels that way and Mental Health Awareness Week (15-21 May) recognises that this can be a difficult time of the year for some.

Anxiety is the main theme for this year, a symptom that is regularly raised with us in our consultations by women who are struggling during their perimenopause years.

Symptoms of anxiety and panic can be distressing, particularly when accompanied by related physical symptoms such as palpitations and disturbed sleep. Waking multiple times during the night is hard, and can lead to poor concentration, exhaustion and a feeling of being less in control.

This often has a profound impact on how we function during the day. These are all common characteristics of the early stages of a woman's menopausal journey but because periods may still be regular and hot flushes and night sweats may not yet have developed, it is not commonly recognised as such.

The timing of perimenopause, typically from the mid-40s, can often be associated with other life events – changing family dynamics or older parents needing more support – so new onset anxiety in women during midlife may be equated to these other pressures and not recognised as hormonally induced.

The impact of anxiety can have a profound effect on women, in the workplace and at home. Thoughts of not being able to cope at work causes 1 in 10 women to leave their jobs in midlife, a third become less socially confident and many feel a detrimental impact on their personal relationships. It is no surprise that women report feeling very vulnerable at this time of their life.

The good news is that there are plenty of options to support women with perimenopausal anxiety, once it is correctly recognised and diagnosed.

Small lifestyle changes can make a real difference but require time out of a busy week to enact.

- Cutting out caffeine completely can help to reduce palpitations and help to improve sleep for many.
- Alcohol is often wrongly used to help sleep and manage anxiety, but it can raise body temperature and make us feel more uncomfortable, so alcohol is best minimised and abstinence for at least 4 nights per week is strongly recommended (it is also highly calorific).
- Exercise releases endorphins which lift mood and reduce stress levels. Enjoying our great outdoors improves our cardiovascular fitness and bone strength, and pausing to appreciate the small things in life can really help our mental wellbeing.

Hormone replacement therapy can also be an effective treatment for perimenopausal symptoms.

VHK are able to risk assess each woman and find the best treatment regime according to her personal history.

We have the time to listen to each woman's journey and create a bespoke management plan according to her symptoms by combining lifestyle support, anxiety management and HRT treatment to improve her quality of life and help her feel more like herself again.

We are able to offer in person and remote consultations. If you would like some help managing perimenopausal anxiety, or other health concerns, please book an appointment.

Book your appointment with VHK Womens Health Clinic
www.vhkwomenshealth.com

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The current composition of the District Council is 18 Conservatives, 7 Independents, 3 Labour and 3 Liberal Democrats. If we, the electorate, use or votes wisely we can keep the pressure on Bromsgrove District Council and make sure that Alvechurch continues to be on their agenda through electing an Independent Councillor.

In the words of Kate Van Der Plank, I have lived here for decades. I know what it is to be local and live in our area.

Some people have asked me what I am championing and, whilst I believe it is more about what you, the electorate, want me to champion for you, I am happy to share examples:

Yes, I care passionately about the erosion of the Green Belt. I see this everyday in a field near me that has become a building site that previously was a beautiful hill with fields, sheep and hedgerows.

Yes, I am concerned that people cannot get to work or school using a local bus service. I know that our current Independent District Councillors have collaborated with the bus providers to address this without any funding from District or County. I would continue the work they have started.

Yes, I get involved in community activities. I love helping and will continue to be a help at Picnic in the Park, Christmas Lights switching on and the very moving Remembrance Ceremony organised by the Parish Council.

Yes, as a member of the Parish Council, I have first hand knowledge of all the groups and societies that are available in our area. They are such an inspiration and often run entirely by our community – for example, The Lounge, who also provides options for young people.

Yes, it concerns me that our area does not have a post office. Although I would not be able to make commercial decisions or offers, I would continue to explore options.

Yes, I am upset and worried about speeding across our area. I have personal experience of this. I try to complete 10,000 steps per day and often I do this with my grandchildren and my daughter's spaniel. I feel quite unsafe with some drivers, and make sure the children are always on the inside of the pavement. Why do drivers think it is OK to speed and risk injury? I am aware of the police and County Councillor efforts to resolve this and again I would continue to target their support.

I will never make a promise that I don't believe is achievable, I think you deserve better than that.

I will however work with other Independent councillors to make our voice heard and influence decisions.

RachaelBailes4AlvechurchVillage
RB4Avillage@gmail.com

Promoted and published by Rachael Bailes, 397 Birmingham Road, Bordesley B97 6RH

May the 4th be with you!

Nominations are closed and the candidates have been out pounding the streets, pushing leaflets through your letterboxes and trying not to appear too argumentative on social media

With all to play for in the battle to wrest control of Bromsgrove District Council from the Tories, there are candidates galore this time, with Labour, Lib Dems and Greens all fielding candidates in the wards across *The Village* area.

Most promisingly for local democracy, independent candidates who have lived in and been involved in their communities for decades are aiming to hold on to the stripe of power through *The Village* area – from Barnt Green and Hopwood at the Birmingham border, through the council wards of Alvechurch Village and Alvechurch South down to the border with Redditch.

Come the count on May 4, they may well be holding the balance of power in Bromsgrove.

Read what the candidates and parties have submitted to us over the following pages – then don't forget to vote on May 4 . . . and remember that this time you will need photo identification to cast your vote.

Alvechurch South

ALAN BAILES
INDEPENDENT

I HAVE lived in the area for 35 years and have a proven track record in serving our community and creating change. I am deeply concerned about the disconnect between the council and the residents it serves and I will be looking for effective consultation with residents and to hold officers to account for their decisions.

I will be working to protect the Green Belt and assist in the forthcoming Local Plan which will consider future developments across the district. Contrary to rhetoric put out by the major parties, independents can effect change at the district level and have done so over the past six years. On the 4th May vote for a strong independent voice for Alvechurch South.

SPENCER LOADES
CONSERVATIVE

WHEN speaking to residents, a common concern is that the police presence needs to be more visible in our area. Residents deserve to feel safe in their own communities and if elected I will work closely with West Mercia Police to tackle anti-social behavior and vehicle theft.

I will also work with the Police & Crime Commissioner's team to fight for more support for our Street Watch initiative. Speeding is a problem throughout the village and across the parish. This demands more police speed enforcement checks in order to prevent the potential for possible fatalities.

ERIC ANTHONY GODFREY
LABOUR

ERIC (known as Tony) has been living in Alvechurch for more than 13 years. He can be seen regularly with a walking club and the footpaths maintenance group. He is keen to grow the groups, as he believes nature is good for the soul and we must preserve it.

Eric's work life has been in buses which he declares as a world away from beginning as a chef. The other years he spent in education and local government. He believes his previous experience as a councillor and his local knowledge place him well to serve the people of Alvechurch.

ALSO STANDING:
SUZANNE NICHOLL
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Alvechurch Village

RACHAEL BAILES
INDEPENDENT

HAVING lived in the area for 35 years, I know what it is to be local. I have been actively involved in our village helping at numerous community functions, having served as a parish councillor for the past two years.

I am concerned about and will be working to protect the Green Belt, cutting down litter, tackling speeding in the village and improving community facilities. On the 4th May make sure that Alvechurch continues to be on the agenda by electing an independent councillor.

MARTIN McLEOD
LABOUR

MARTIN was born in Dundee and says he was taught all he knows by his mother. He moved to England in 2001. Martin's enthusiasm for football led him to bring grassroots football to Wiggin Memorial Ground. He has worked for a spell at the Alvechurch Inn and is a

continues overleaf

Bromsgrove District Council Elections 4 May 2023

Alvechurch, Beoley, Bordesley, Portway and Rowney Green

Vote for a strong independent voice for OUR area

Vote Alan Bailes

"I want to create partnerships with local people so that together we can create local solutions to local problems."

Alvechurch South

My professional experience often means I'm called upon to assist with transport issues in the area, such as planning applications. I've been actively involved with Alvechurch Parish Council in assisting them with the Neighbourhood Plan and Action Plans. I'm co-founder of Bordesley Matters, aiming to get a better environment.

Over the years I've also undertaken the following local roles: Chairman of School Governors at Alvechurch Crown Meadow; Chairman of Redditch Association of Governors & Chairman of Worcestershire Association of Governors; and West Midlands Transport Forum – Committee Member.

I'm passionate about:

- **Erosion of the green belt**
- **Better public transport provision**
- **Reducing crime and safety**
- **Explosion of litter in the area**
- **Environmental issues**

I'm standing for election on 4 May to be the Independent District Councillor for our area – and I would love your vote.

I have lived in South Alvechurch for 35 years and been actively involved in local issues. I love living in the area, care passionately about what goes on **and have a proven track record for serving our community.**

I will also bring essential, relevant professional experience to this role as a highly experienced transport planning consultant, working with Councils nationwide. I know how Councils work and will hold them to account – making sure essential services and infrastructure are delivered when promised.

I'm not a member of a political party nor am I interested in party rhetoric. I'm an Independent and I'm more interested in seeking your views and working with you to get the right improvements for our area.

Only by working in partnership can we get a better deal for residents.

So vote for the person – not the Party – on 4 May.

I'm keen to listen to you and understand what issues you want me to fight for within the your area

alan4alvechurch@gmail.com

Alan4AlvechurchSouth

Promoted and published by Alan Bailes, 397 Birmingham Road, Bordesley B97 6RH

volunteer at a local charity, while also being on the local football league committee. He spent a short time as co-secretary of Beoley Village FC and has recently set up his own club, Alvechurch Village FC.

BARRY THORNTON
CONSERVATIVE

I HAVE been active in this area for more 19 years and understand many of the residents' concerns in the Village – and have looked for ways to give back to the community. I am passionate about making Alvechurch Village an even better place to live, and to me that means ensuring that all residents' voices are heard and their concerns are answered.

A common concern is that the police presence needs to be more visible in our area. Residents deserve to feel safe in their own communities and if elected I will work closely with West Mercia Police to tackle anti-social behaviour, vehicle theft, and to fight for more support for our Street Watch initiative.

ALSO STANDING:
REBECCA STEVENS
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Barnt Green & Hopwood

CHARLIE HOTHAM
INDEPENDENT

OVER the past four years it has been a privilege to serve as district councillor for Barnt Green and Hopwood ward and also as a Barnt Green parish councillor. I have also regularly attended and reported to Alvechurch Parish Council on Hopwood matters. As an independent, I am able to fully represent the view of residents putting people before politics – no party whip, just a conscience and wish to do the best for the individual and the community.

I am deeply concerned as to the outcome of the long-awaited district-wide Green Belt and district plan review. Rest assured, if elected I will be fighting to protect the ward from unwelcome development while understanding the need for more affordable homes.

KIRAN GULIA
LABOUR

KIRAN is a university academic. Her passion for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is inspiring the next generation – in particular women in education and industry. She, along with her husband and children, live in Barnt Green. She is motivated to be a councillor to serve the area with her passion in Smart City Projects.

With Dr Gulia's engineering background, she is determined to bring progressive change in the area with advanced engineering for sustainable economy.

AMRITJOT NANNAR
CONSERVATIVE

IT'S BEEN a challenging few years in Barnt Green and Hopwood, and for us all, but we continue to pull together as a community to help each other. As we look ahead, there is cause for gentle optimism. £17.3m of investment is set to breathe a new lease of life into Bromsgrove's town centre, and we've been successful in gaining more money to tackle the issues of traffic, potholes and congestion.

Barnt Green and Hopwood needs a strong local voice, and I believe I am well placed to be your representative, standing up for our community.

If you elect me, I will be a dedicated public servant to our local communities and all of Bromsgrove district.

Aston Fields

JANE ELLEDGE
LABOUR

JANE has lived in Bromsgrove for more than 20 years and is an IT systems trainer. Her three children attended Finstall FIrst, Aston Fields and South Bromsgrove schools and she is a familiar face around Aston Fields. She is keen to work with local residents to ensure Aston Fields is a great place to live, and to develop and implement council policies to improve Bromsgrove and ensure our council tax is well spent.

KYLE DAISLEY
CONSERVATIVE

AS THE county councillor for Bromsgrove South, I have the privilege of representing many of you already. I have lived in Bromsgrove district since I was adopted at the age of two.

I've worked hard in Aston Fields to develop our community to become a better place to live, work and visit. I'm pleased Aston Fields has now been recognised as a Town Centre by Bromsgrove District Council, which has given us more opportunities to deliver on residents' priorities.

When you raised burglaries as one of your top local concerns, I worked hard with West Mercia Police to provide every house in Aston Fields with a free SmartWater Kit to enable residents to protect their property.

In 2021 I promised to create a Community Development Group to give residents control over local decision-making, and I'm pleased to have set up the Love Aston Fields Community Group, made up of residents, traders, and local authority representatives.

continues overleaf

MARTINE REYNOLDS
LIB DEM

MARTINE has lived in the town for most of her 50 years, raised and had her family educated here. Martine knows only too well the concerns we share because she has been listening to residents tell her on the doorstep and in the street. Martine is striving for a better Bromsgrove and for residents' voices to be heard.

Cofton

CHRISTINE MCDONALD
LABOUR

CHRISTINE is married with two children and three grandchildren and has lived in Bromsgrove district all her life. Christine worked at Rover for many years which she believes has given her much appreciation into what motivates business in setting up in a certain district in the country.

Christine has served for several years as a district councillor and has re-nominated herself for the job because she feels that change is now needed in Bromsgrove and that she wants to do her bit for her community.

ANITA DALE
CONSERVATIVE

AS A PROUD local resident of Lickey Parish for 34 years and a business owner operating from my home, I have had the privilege of both living and working in this wonderful area. My deep connection to the community has only strengthened my commitment to serve Cofton and Bromsgrove district.

Over the years, Cofton and the broader Bromsgrove district have experienced a bustling and challenging period, but we continue to grow stronger together. Throughout my five years as the Liaison Officer for a local school's Parents Association, I developed a keen understanding of the needs and concerns of our community. If you elect me, I pledge to represent Cofton with unwavering dedication and to serve our local communities and the entire Bromsgrove district to the best of my ability.

ALSO STANDING:
DAVID NICKLIN
LIB DEM

Lickey Hills

JANET KING
LIB DEM

JANET has represented Lickey Hills on Bromsgrove District Council for the past four years, having been a parish councillor for 20 years. She campaigned successfully with residents to retain local bus services 202 and 145 and stopped the demolition of Wadderton in Greenhill.

Janet is working to reopen Artrix, giving a voice to our villages, standing up for the Green Belt, creating safer local roads, reducing traffic congestion and decarbonising Bromsgrove by 2040.

BAKUL KUMAR
CONSERVATIVE

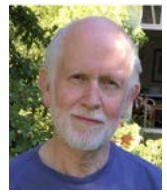
AS A resident of Blackwell for more than ten years and a retired NHS Consultant, I have dedicated my time to giving back to our community, currently serving as the Chair of Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council.

Throughout my tenure, I have achieved numerous accomplishments, including working diligently to ensure that new housing applications prioritise Green Belt preservation, high-quality design, and respect for residents' views.

I am passionate about promoting community health and wellbeing, demonstrated by initiatives like the weekly "Blackwell Gentle Walk," and my involvement in litter picks. I have supported local historian efforts, worked with contractors to plant bulbs and trees and developed a carbon footprint tool for our parish.

If elected to represent Lickey Hills , I pledge to work closely with residents to address pressing issues such as parking and speeding, anti-social behaviour, and ensuring ethical housing development. I will also hold regular surgeries to listen to and address local needs.

JOHN COCHRANE
LABOUR



BORN in Rubery, John attended state schools in Birmingham and Edinburgh Medical School. After hospital work in Sierra Leone, he was a GP in Redditch for over 20 years, latterly also part time in Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS).

He was a magistrate in the Worcestershire Adult Criminal and Family Courts and has been a Labour Party member since 1977.

John's other community activities have included school governor roles in Alvechurch, Redditch and Barnt Green. John is a member of Bromsgrove and Redditch Welcomes Refugees (BRWR) and Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN) groups.

Marlbrook

ALAN COOPER
LABOUR

HAVING lived in Bromsgrove for more than 50 years with his wife and children, Alan has nominated himself out of concern for the future for his grandchildren and the opportunities that will await them.

Alan is a qualified mechanical engineer and an educationalist; he worked in manufacturing for many years and is a member of the University and College Union.

His interest in education is embedded in his believe that everyone deserves the chance to have a good education because, as he put it, "education is the pillar to a future of hope and happiness".

HELEN JONES
CONSERVATIVE

IT IS an honour to serve Marlbrook as your local district councillor and I am pleased to have been re-selected as your Conservative Party candidate.

It's been a challenging few years in Marlbrook, but we have pulled together as a community to help each other. As we look ahead there are opportunities for a brighter future.

If you re-elect me, I will continue to represent Marlbrook to the best of my ability and will be a dedicated public servant to our local communities and all of Bromsgrove district, continuing to support our local groups and events, and delivering even better for everyone who lives and works here.

ALSO STANDING:
MASON CHERRINGTON
REFORM UK

Norton (& Lickey End)

ROBERT HUNTER
LIB DEM

ROB moved to Bromsgrove as a child and went to North Bromsgrove High School. He now lives in Bromsgrove with a young family of his own and works full time in the rail industry.

Rob has represented Norton and Lickey End for the past four years and leads the Lib Dem group on Bromsgrove District Council.

Rob is backing the Bromsgrove Lib Dem manifesto "Four for the Fourth" and is particularly interested in improving our local environment and tackling traffic congestion.

continues overleaf

'Fairer and greener' community pledge

A TOTAL of nine Green Party candidates are standing across the wards in the Bromsgrove elections.

Spokesperson Jill Harvey said:"We're delighted to unveil our team of fantastic candidates ready to represent communities across Bromsgrove.

"When you vote Green, you'll be helping to elect hardworking councillors committed to making our town a fairer, greener community."

The Green Party is calling for Bromsgrove council and the government to work harder to beat the housing crisis while ensuring natural spaces are protected. In their *Right Homes, Right Place, Right Price Charter* the Greens are proposing steps that they believe would simultaneously protect valuable green space for communities, reduce climate emissions, tackle fuel poverty and provide genuinely affordable housing.

The Green Party's Peter Harvey said: "Everyone deserves a place that they can call home. That's why we want to see changes across the housing sector, to create fairer, greener communities.

"Many residents are faced with homes that are unaffordable to buy, unaffordable to rent and unaffordable to heat.

"Communities in Bromsgrove are facing the same problems as people up and down the country – with developers being allowed to build houses that local people often can't afford, and failing to ensure local services like buses and GP surgeries get the investment they need.

"Developers are being allowed to ride roughshod over the needs of communities and the environment. And this has got to stop," he explained

Green Party candidates standing in *The Village* area (clockwise from top, left): Martin Ball, Alvechurch Village; Jill Harvey, Cofton; John Smout, Tardebigge; Julian Gray, Rubery South; Peter Harvey, Marlbrook; Nick Trow, Aston Fields.

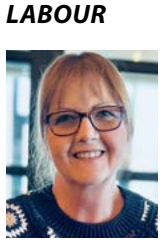
KUMAR MUNIANDY
CONSERVATIVE

IT'S BEEN a challenging few years in Norton, and for us all, but we continue to pull together as a community to help each other. Norton needs a strong local voice, and I believe I am well placed to be your representative, standing up for our community.

If you elect me, I will represent Norton to the best of my ability, and will be a dedicated public servant to our local communities and all of Bromsgrove District.

Rubery South

ESTHER GRAY
LABOUR



ESTHER was born in Bromsgrove and says she was "made in Rubery". She moved to Rubery in 1978 and worked at Austin Rover for ten years. She brought her daughter up here and her late husband was the caretaker of two schools in the area.

Esther has considerable expertise in the well-being of children; she became an Early Years Regulatory Inspector for Ofsted after a long childcare career, including childminding in Rubery.

NICK PSIRIDES
CONSERVATIVE

AS A long-time resident of Rubery South, I understand the unique needs and concerns of our community. My professional background in finance and project management has equipped me with the skills necessary to effectively manage resources and work collaboratively with various stakeholders. If elected, I will focus on preserving our local environment and maintaining our cherished green spaces, while also promoting sustainable development that respects the character of Rubery South and meets the needs of our growing community.

Slideslow

SAM EVANS
LIB DEM

HARWOOD PARK resident Sam Evans is standing for the Slideslow ward. Sam grew up in Bromsgrove and attended local schools of Finstall First School, Aston Fields Middle School and South Bromsgrove High School.

He has been working hard for the residents of The Oakalls, Parklands and Harwood Park, listening and acting on their concerns and priorities.

As a campaigner Sam has a record of action, getting signs, potholes and more fixed and he is looking forward to delivering more for residents if he is fortunate to represent Slideslow on Bromsgrove District Council.

MICHAEL THOMPSON
CONSERVATIVE

I AM a local teacher and moved to Bromsgrove almost 20 years ago to take up a post in a local school, where I still work. Whilst I was not raised in Bromsgrove, my two children were and, hence, it is a place to which I have a profound connection.

In all honesty, I believe that politicians talk too much. I came into politics to listen and not to stand on a soap box. Like my predecessor, Caroline Spencer, I am about engagement and enabling.

In my role as portfolio holder for Leisure and Culture, I have been pleased to oversee the Welcome Back Programme in the town centre. These events have very much rekindled the colour and vibrancy of the town.

Tardebigge

PETER WHITTAKER
CONSERVATIVE

AS A lifelong Tardebigge ward resident and self-employed farmer, I am deeply appreciative of our local community for providing a vibrant, safe, and engaging place to call home.

I am passionate about enhancing the quality of life in our area, ensuring that residents' voices are heard and their perspectives are represented.

Our community currently faces increasing pressure from development, and I am dedicated to preserving the exceptional character of our area.

I will work tirelessly to ensure that any changes benefit the residents, protect our green spaces, support high-quality education for our children, and facilitate access to care and other facilities to support our elderly and vulnerable.

SEAN SHANNON
LABOUR

SEAN was born and has lived most of life in Aston Fields and Tardebigge wards. After a lifetime in vehicle R&D he is now retired. Sean has served at county and district councils, as a school governor, a board member of a housing trust, and performs and helps run a community samba band. He is saddened to see our town in such a poor state, council tax now higher than Birmingham and with volunteer residents having to clean streets. Only a Labour Council can return Bromsgrove to the condition its residents deserve.

ALSO STANDING:
VALERIE CLARKE, *LIB DEM*

Thank you, Caroline!

Sarah Rees reflects on Caroline Spencer's time as district councillor for Slideslow Ward, including The Oakalls and Parklands.

THIS month Councillor Caroline Spencer will step down from her role at Bromsgrove District Council. With responsibility for the Slideslow Ward since 2003, Caroline has been incredibly proactive in supporting the residents of The Oakalls and Parklands for the past 20 years.

She was instrumental in launching the Oakalls Community Carols get-together in 2011, with the event running annually for 9 years, until the pandemic put pay to social gatherings in 2020. She helped co-ordinate the hugely successful "Picnic in the Park" in May 2012, where hundreds of local people came together on a gloriously sunny day to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

It is partly thanks to Caroline that the estate blossoms so beautifully in the spring each year with a "host of golden daffodils", as she arranged and took part in bulb-planting activities in 2011 and 2017.

Caroline has joined residents for numerous litter picks across the estate; campaigned for the re-surfacing of the car park on Green Park Road in 2013 and helped ensure the ducks had a lovely new home on the balancing pond in 2015.

Following the encampment of a group of travellers in June 2016, Caroline was behind the bollard and fencing protection measures put in place, to eliminate future access to these vulnerable areas.

From fly tipping issues to dog fouling prevention, and much needed grass cutting to the long-awaited installation of a bus shelter on Regents Park Road, Caroline has been a voice for the people of the Oakalls and Parklands at the District Council.

Diamond jubilee (above): Celebrating with young villagers.
Making improvements (left): Caroline with County Councillor Kit Taylor, working to improve the footpath between Finstall and The Oakalls.

February 2020: Working towards a safer roundabout.

Bulb planting: Caroline joins in with the 10th Brownie pack in 2017.

I would like to thank Caroline for her tireless efforts to make our estate a better place to live and for helping to bring the community together over the past two decades. Wishing Caroline a very happy and well deserved "retirement".

In the community: Assessing the overgrown duck pond.

Getting involved: Caroline takes part in the spring litter pick.

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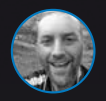
What's your number?

How much is Enough?

PPM Financial Planning have the answers.

Meet the Team

When you become a client at PPM Financial Planning you do not just acquire an adviser, but a team of professionals who all know your story and have their own integral part to play in bringing it to life

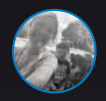


Martin Pryor
Financial Planner & Adviser

Business & Finance degree to Graduate training course at Prudential, leading to becoming a qualified independent financial adviser in 1996 and setting up PPM Financial Planning in 2006.

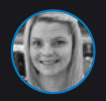
Nicky Lowndes
General Manager

Nicky has been at PPM Financial Planning since the very beginning in 2006 bringing with her 19 years of banking experience with HSBC.



Laura Siddall
Financial Planner & Adviser

Laura has 19 years of industry experience. Her role is to construct financial plans for clients using our cash flow modelling software, helping deliver true financial planning.

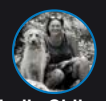


Laura Daniels
Mortgage Adviser

Laura joined in 2016, providing admin support whilst completing training to become our qualified mortgage broker.

Louise Wheeler
Paraplanner

Louise Joined PPM in September 2021, bringing with her 8 years of paraplanning experience and 13 years working within financial services.



Jodie Chilcott
Office Administrator

Jodie joined PPM from an accountancy background and performs a variety of tasks in the day to day running of the business.

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LIMITS SWEPT ASIDE

Martin Pryor explains what the changes in the Spring Budget mean for those with big pension pots.

CHANCELLOR Jeremy Hunt, has scrapped the lifetime allowance (LTA), increased the annual allowance (AA) and re-formed the Money Purchase Annual Allowance (MPAA) as part of the 2023 Spring Budget.

The Chancellor said the LTA charge would be removed from April 2023 before the LTA is abolished entirely from April 2024; the AA would rise from £40,000 to £60,000 and the MPAA would more than double from £4,000 to £10,000 from April 2023.

The Government said the minimum tapered annual allowance (MTAA) would also increase from £4,000 to £10,000 from 6 April 2023.

The Government said individuals will continue to be able to carry forward unused annual allowances from the three previous tax years - adding the adjusted income threshold for the tapered annual allowance will also be increased from £240,000 to £260,000 from 6 April 2023.

It said the maximum pension commencement lump sum for those without protections will be retained at its current level of £268,275 and will be frozen thereafter.

But it added the amount which can be taken tax-free will be restricted to 25% of the current LTA of £1,073,100 or £268,275.

The move on pension allowances comes in a bid to tackle fears that the current allowances were compelling many professionals, particularly doctors, to retire in their fifties. An issue, it said, that has become more acute since the Government announced a six-year freeze on the annual and lifetime allowances in 2020.

HM Treasury said reforming the pensions lifetime allowance, annual allowance and money purchase annual allowance would encourage highly-skilled workers, such as senior NHS doctors, to remain in the labour market, and help to tackle NHS waiting lists.

In his speech, the Chancellor said he did not want doctors or anyone else to retire early because of how the tax system works.

The Budget document added that, to increase retention in the workforce of the public sector, open and closed public service pension schemes for a given workforce would be considered linked for the purposes of calculating annual allowance charges, thus allowing members to offset any negative real growth for AA purposes in legacy public service pension schemes against the AA. The LTA was originally set at £1.5m when it was introduced on A-Day in 2006. It gradually rose to £1.8m in 2010 but fell to just £1m in 2016. Upratings since then have seen the LTA grow to £1.073m.

The AA was originally set at £215,000 in 2006, rising to £255,000 in the 2010/11 tax year before being cut back.

The MPAA was introduced in April 2015 at £10,000 before being cut to £4,000 from the 2017/18 tax year.

Tax Year	Lifetime allowance (LTA)	Annual allowance (AA)	Money purchase annual allowance (MPAA)	Minimum tapered annual allowance
2006/07	£ 1,500,000	£ 215,000		
2007/08	£ 1,600,000	£ 225,000		
2008/09	£ 1,650,000	£ 235,000		
2009/10	£ 1,750,000	£ 245,000		
2010/11	£ 1,800,000	£ 255,000		
2011/12	£ 1,800,000	£ 50,000		
2012/13	£ 1,500,000	£ 50,000		
2013/14	£ 1,500,000	£ 50,000		
2014/15	£ 1,250,000	£ 40,000		
2015/16	£ 1,250,000	£ 40,000	£ 10,000	
2016/17	£ 1,000,000	£ 40,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000
2017/18	£ 1,000,000	£ 40,000	£ 4,000	£ 10,000
2018/19	£ 1,030,000	£ 40,000	£ 4,000	£ 10,000
2019/20	£ 1,055,000	£ 40,000	£ 4,000	£ 10,000
2020/21	£ 1,073,100	£ 40,000	£ 4,000	£ 4,000
2021/22	£ 1,073,100	£ 40,000	£ 4,000	£ 4,000
2022/23	£ 1,073,100	£ 40,000	£ 4,000	£ 4,000
2023/24	LTA charge removed	£ 60,000	£ 10,000	£ 10,000
2024/25	LTA abolished	TBC	TBC	TBC

Source:** HMRC, Professional Pensions* ***Note: *The 2015/16 tax year was split into two periods as part of special arrangements were put in place when pension input periods were aligned to tax years. The pre-alignment period ran from 6 April 2015 to 8 July 2015 and covered pension input periods which ended between the two dates. The post-alignment period ran from 9 July 2015 to 5 April 2016. Transitional arrangements put in place for this year meant that different rates for allowances applied to some people.*

How pension tax allowances have changed since A-Day

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner

For more information, please contact us

Tel: 07961 162818
martinpryor@ppmfinancialplanning.com
www.ppmfinancialplanning.com

Tax treatment varies according to individual circumstances and is subject to change.

The value of your investment and any income from it can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

How equity release can help in your retirement

Mark Meads outlines how equity release can benefit travel, helping family, and independence in your retirement.

Mark Meads (right) is here to help you as you navigate your finances.

PEOPLE often ask me: "what are the main reasons for releasing equity from a property?"

There are many reasons why you may choose to release equity, however some of the most common ones can help improve your lifestyle in your retirement, allowing you to live the life you want:

■ To supplement retirement income: Many retirees find that their pension or savings are not enough to cover their expenses in later life. Equity release can provide a source of additional income that can help them maintain their standard of living.

■ To pay off debts: Equity release can be used to pay off outstanding debts, such as interest only mortgages credit card balances or loans, which can reduce financial stress and improve cash flow.

■ To make home improvements: Homeowners may choose to release equity in their property to fund home renovations or repairs, which can improve their quality of life and increase the value of their home.

■ To help family members: Some people choose to release equity to help their children or grandchildren, for example, by providing a deposit for a property purchase or funding education.

■ To go on holiday or travel: Equity release can provide the funds needed to take a dream holiday or travel to new destinations, which can be a rewarding experience for retirees.

■ To maintain independence: Equity release can help older homeowners to stay in their own home and maintain their independence, by providing the funds needed to pay for care or support services.

To see how we can help with all your mortgage needs, including equity release, please call us on: 0121 445 1227. Or contact via the website: www.villagefinancial.co.uk

This firm usually charges a fee for mortgage advice. The amount of the fee will depend upon your needs and circumstances. This will be discussed and agreed with you at the earliest opportunity. Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up payments on your mortgage. An Equity Release product will reduce the value of your estate, will not be suitable for everyone and may affect your entitlement to state benefits. To understand the features and risks please ask for a personalised illustration. Village Financial Solutions Ltd is an appointed representative of PRIMIS Mortgage Network. PRIMIS Mortgage Network is a trading style of Personal Touch Financial Services Limited, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Leo, the unfriendly lion

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

MAY, and Venus still dominates the early evening sky, visible as soon as the Sun has dipped below the horizon just after 8.30pm.

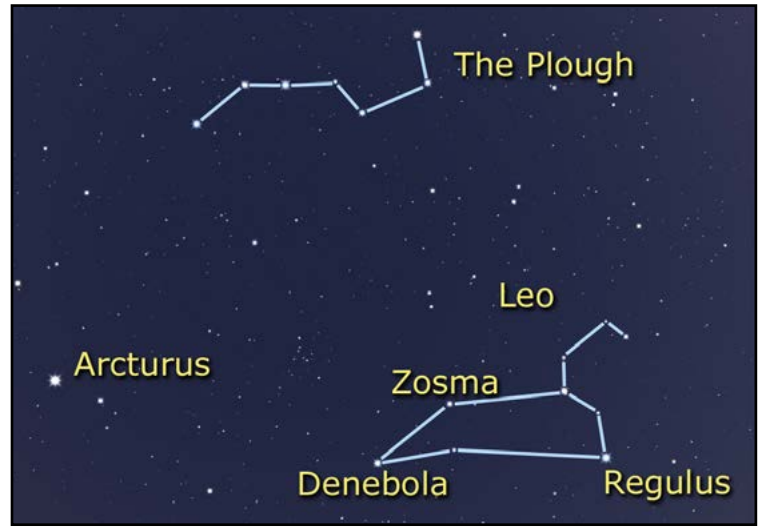
Look towards the sunset and there it will be, looking like an aircraft or even a UFO, especially if you are in a moving vehicle.

This planet was once thought of as Earth's twin and was imagined to have a similar atmosphere to ours with exotic forms of life possibly living beneath those clouds. This was all disproved by successive probes and by Russia's Venera 9 photo of a hot, dry rocky surface in 1975. Still, the planet does look marvellous in the evening glow, especially on the 23rd of the month when a thin crescent Moon is close by.

Mars is also visible in the sky as it gets darker towards 10pm in the evening. Now sitting in the constellation of Virgo, forming a triangle with the two bright stars Castor and Pollux, it is distinguishable by its distinct orange hue. These two planets are with us all month as they desperately try to climb away from the ever earlier sunset.

Watch as Mars moves up and past the heads of the Virgo twins and Venus tries to catch up, becoming the dazzlingly brightest object in the sky.

It is sitting at the bottom of a sort of pentangle of stars that make up the constellation of Auriga with its brightest star, Capella, at the top. Commonly known as the Charioteer to the Ancient Greeks, Auriga seems to have been a very special charioteer by the name of Erichthonius of Athens, inventor of the four-horse chariot.



Look for Leo: And find the star meaning 'The Lion's Tail'.
Pictures courtesy of NASA.

Hot, dry and rocky: The surface of Venus.

Now, if you had attended the last Alvechurch Acoustic Roots session (look for them on Facebook) you would have been entertained by a very talented young lady, Josie Fields, singing about Leo. As it happens, Leo is just about the most prominent constellation this month.

Turning left from Venus, high in the south, below the Plough, is a bright star, Regulus. This the brightest star in Leo, marking his front foot.

Above that is a backwards question mark that is the "Sickle" asterism and Leo's body can be seen to the left, really looking like a crouching lion.

Regulus is an amazing star, or rather collection of stars, as it consists of a main star which is like a blue-white version of our Sun. This is orbited by a tiny white dwarf and this pair is orbited by another pair of faint stars. Imagine what the sunsets must look like on a planet in this system!

The star at the at the end of Leo's tail is Denebola, meaning "The Lion's Tail" and to the right and above that is one of my favourite star names, Zosma.

If I were a star I think I would like to be called Zosma although it is ancient Greek for girdle!

Actually, in mythology, Leo was not a nice lion at all. He would lure young maidens back to his lair and it took Hercules to sort him out. Hooray for Hercules but do look out for the unfriendly lion and the chariot inventor in the sky.

The anonymous birder

How to enjoy village birdlife

A place they call home

Ever had a favourite holiday spot you returned to year after year? Wasn't it boring to return to the same place? Well no, not really: the accommodation was comfortable, there were plenty of good places to eat, the weather was generally good, the kids liked it, especially the crazy golf; a home from home really. So just like migratory birds then? Well, yes, apart from finding a new mate and the crazy golf.

What about proper home? A place that hopefully suits our needs. Maybe not as picturesque or with the novelty of our holiday destination but provides what we need on a day-to-day basis.

Some birds like home so much they don't bother to travel, and they definitely don't need novelty. Of all the birds we encounter some will be migratory, some not, but they will be there because that particular habitat suits them. Somewhere to find a mate, food they like and being able to raise young in tolerable conditions

Over the past few months we have considered different ways to identify birds: sight, sound, movement and behaviour. Another piece of the puzzle is place.

Take seagulls for instance . . . well they're not, are they? I don't want to enter the realms of parental advice but if the phrases, "Ooh, look at the seagulls!", "Let's feed the seagulls!" or the like arise, a sensitive but firm, "Sorry, but we are not allowed to feed the GULLS", should be employed from the earliest opportunity.

There are a couple of situations that arise when we start to get more interested in birdlife. I have gone through these stages so you don't have to – but you will anyway. If you get into listing, there will be birds that can occur on or near your patch but by chance, you never see them. They are usually fairly rare or are from populations have fallen over the years, but are still possible to see. Hawfinch and lesser spotted woodpecker are just two of mine, but it might be kingfisher for you.

On its holiday? A gull, by the sea - but still not a 'seagull'. If those who know their gulls are wondering where this picture was taken . . . it was in New Zealand! Picture/*Adrian Smith*

You will tend to manifest a sighting as one you are missing because you are so desperate to see it. But it is usually a chaffinch or a greater spotted at a distance, something much common than your rare discovery.

The other misconception is that you've seen a bird that is very, very unlikely to be seen in the particular place you've seen it.

I always enjoy a bit of bird chat with my neighbours and someone had observed a bird of prey perched on a fence. They had looked up birds of prey (tick) and had thought it may be a merlin. With a bit more research they may have come up with the much more likely male sparrowhawk, similar in appearance but now very common in suburban areas due to preying on garden birds.

A merlin is much more likely to be seen near the coast, in heathland or marshes. No problem, it improves your knowledge either way. Of course, during the migration periods in spring and autumn unusual sightings can happen but they too are generally in a habitat which suits the visitor. For example Osprey sightings recorded on the Bittell reservoirs.

So if you think you've seen something but aren't sure, find out where it is most commonly seen as part of your detective work. That is probably not a violet capped hummingbird on the feeder.

If you have been watching *Wild Isles* on the BBC, and I highly recommend the programme, it is a great primer on the different broad habitats in our country and some of the species that are most at home in them.

Due to breeding territories, our local patch will have particular species in particular places at this time and can be seen in the same place day after day.

Spring is a great time to really get to know the habits, song and behaviour of the birds on your walk or in your garden. Migrants such as chiff chaffs, blackcaps, whitethroats, swallows, martins, swifts and willow warblers will swell the numbers of our local birds and with the dawn chorus reaching a peak – but another more relaxed version at dusk, if you don't like early mornings – it really is peak birding time. Wherever you happen to be. **JL**

Picnic in the park returns

POPULAR village event "Picnic in the Park" returns once again this year on Sunday 28 May in The Meadows, Alvechurch.

Following last year's very successful 10th anniversary picnic, which coincided with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the 2023 event will take place just a few weeks after the Coronation of King Charles III, so marking another royal celebration.

The organising committee were initially concerned about how they were going to top the 2022 picnic which included a flyover by a Lancaster bomber, the event being opened by a war veteran and seeing the biggest crowd of both people and dogs so far.

However, the organising team has continued to work hard to make the picnics bigger and better year on year.

This year, weather permitting, there will be another official Battle of Britain flyover by not one plane, but two; a Hurricane and a Spitfire.

The organisers are also hoping to have pony rides back again for the first time in some years, however this is yet to be confirmed.

The official opening at 12 noon will include players from Alvechurch Football Club and the designer of this year's Picnic in the Park logo, Betsy aged 7.

Due to the continued success of the Fun Dog Show, this will now start at 10.30am (previously 11am), to allow more time to showcase all the dogs in the community with classes such as Best Trick, Waggiest Tail and Cutest Puppy.

Local canine expert Maggie Scott will judge once more and this year, most classes will not only have a rosette to 4th place but entrants can also win up to £20 of prizes. All class winners go through to Best in Show winning an additional rosette, medal and winner's trophy. Registration is on the day but organisers remind entrants to get there from 10am as registration closes this year at 10.25am.

The winning logo: Shows the sports theme of the event, by Betsy.

The event promises to have something for everyone, with a very full entertainment programme.

The day itself will see the return of some firm favourites including refreshments from the Lounge and others, a bouncy castle, face painting, sporting challenges, games, activities, raffles, tombolas and plenty of treats to buy and collect.

The picnic runs until 4.30pm when everyone packs up and heads over to Alvechurch Cricket Club for a fun packed evening of entertainment.

A spokesperson for the event said "The event could not be held without the generosity of the sponsors: Thomas Brothers, LogCo.co, Charles Lovell & Co, Oulsnam and Alvechurch Dental. Massive thanks goes to these sponsors and to those that have donated prizes for a raffle and fancy-dress competition.

"The committee also are very grateful for the ongoing support from Alvechurch Parish Council, as well as Bromsgrove District Council."

The theme of the picnic this year is "Sports", so villagers are encouraged to dig out their Sporty Spice outfit, sumo wrestler kit or favourite sports strip and they could win a spot cash prize!

The organising committee also put out a request for volunteers from the community to help the event run smoothly. "As ever, stewards are needed to help out on the day so if you could donate just one hour of your time on the day please email alvechurchpitp@gmail.com – you will get free refreshments including a bap and a pint!"

■ **You can find more information at their Facebook page (search for Alvechurch Parish Picnic in the Park) or email them at alvechurchpitp@gmail.com.**

CAN MAY RESCUE SPRING?

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

MARCH had a cold start, with snowfall on the 9th, 10th and 11th. Heavy, dry snow fell overnight on the 9th and 10th, so villagers woke to 10-11cm, with complete snow cover in some areas. Further snow fell into the morning but turned into sleet and rain into the afternoon and night.

This March was also incredibly wet, with 125.9mm of rainfall, making up more than double (234%) of the average. According to my records which span from 1990 - 2023, only March 2018 saw more rainfall (126.1mm).

Following March's wet weather, April had a dry start but after that became fairly dull and wet, with overcast skies and rain, only reaching 85% of the average sunshine for the month.

The mean temperature so far for April (to the 17th) has been 0.8C below average at 8.1C, well below what we would expect for this time of the year. . . but, the cricket season has started, so what else would we expect in the UK!

We did however, enjoy a day or two of warm spring-like weather over the Easter weekend, so hopefully more of that is to come as we progress further into the warmer months.

The Outlook

CONFIDENCE in the forecast for May is low, particularly at the start of the month, following the wet and chilly April we've had.

There is a greater chance of a more settled weather pattern, as we head further into spring, with a higher likelihood of clearer and drier conditions. Hopefully with some warmer and sunnier conditions.

Periods of unsettled and changeable weather are still possible in May, but temperatures will probably return closer to average for the time of year, with more typical spring-like conditions likely.

Above: Lambs enjoying the sunshine.

Blossoming trees on Newbourne Hill.

A shower cloud over Rowney Green.

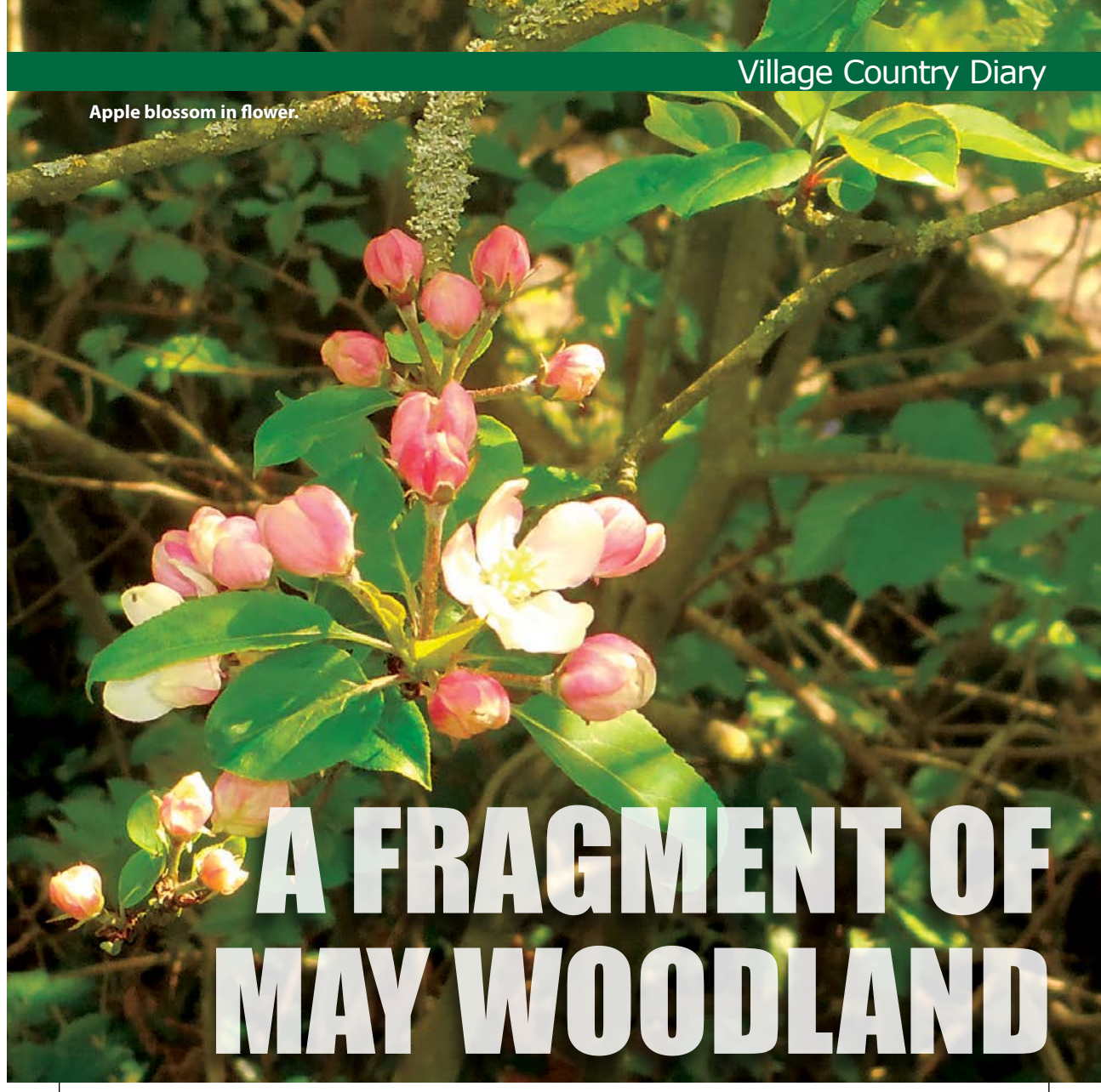
March 2023

Mean Max	10.1C	0.3C below average
Mean Min	3.8C	1.0C above average
Mean	6.9C	0.3C above average
Rainfall	125.9mm	234% of average
Sunshine	95.4hrs	85% of average

April 2023 (to the 17th)

Mean Max	12.2C	1.8C below average
Mean Min	4.0C	0.3C below average
Mean	8.1C	0.8C below average
Rainfall	36.6mm	61% of average
Sunshine	88.3hrs	64% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***



Apple blossom in flower.

A FRAGMENT OF MAY WOODLAND

Mary Green takes us up steep and windy Scarfield Hill, and discusses what can be found as we go.

IT'S difficult to see what May will be like as I write this in April. Everything is still coming out rather late this year, though in the warm spells we've had, things can all catch up with each other and appear at the same time. My plum and damson blossom both came late but all out at once!

My biodiversity walk this month takes us up Scarfield Hill from Alvechurch, and along some of the adjacent roads. This is not a walk I do in real life with groups, because the road is too busy, but it's quite OK for individuals and small numbers. Don't forget though to walk with regard to the traffic. This doesn't mean always walking on the right – that's just the default. Walk where the drivers can best see you, so walk on the left round a right-hand bend or up a blind summit. So on this walk you may well find yourself switching sides quite a lot.

I'll start at the canal bridge by Alvechurch station. There are good trees around here including a cou-

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ple of old oaks and a nice hazel over the canal, so usually plenty of birds. You can look over the bridge at the newly-planted orchard trees by the canal and the patch of old woodland behind them.

As you walk up the hill though there is a big contrast between what the wildlife could be like and what it is. The hedgerows up both sides of the road here are remnants of ancient woodland, some of the best along the roads into the village. But the hedges are very severely flailed most of the way, so much of the potential is diminished.

The bigger trees all the way up to Foxhill Lane are mostly absolutely fine. There are some really big old oaks which in May should be in young leaf and flower. We tend not to think of these kind of big trees as flowery, unless we suffer from hay fever, but they have lovely tassels of small yellowish flowers.

There are some ash trees as well. These will be in young leaf, lovely feathery green, but the flowers may well be over as they came in April before the leaves. Ash flowers are clusters of brownish flowers with yellow pollen, very attractive close up but you might not notice them.

Field maples flower at this time too, again bunches of tiny yellowish flowers. All of these mean that the high canopy above the road is really attractive and will be full of insects and birds. Some of the trees are hundreds of years old.

Below these big trees there should be a layer of other, smaller, trees, many also flowering in May. This is where we see what's missing. The hedges should be frothing with hawthorn blossom all the way along, following earlier blackthorn blossom and hazel catkins which would have finished if they'd been allowed to start. Holly should be full of little clusters of white flowers. Crab apple, guelder rose and dogwood should be flowering.

All of these are in the hedges, but the hedges are mostly green but flowerless. Around the gateways or near the big trees you will find bits

Scarfield Hill: Flailing a hedge on the side of the road.

of hedge that have escaped the flails and there will be blossom.

Not only are these smaller trees kept stunted, but there are young oaks, ash and maples in the hedges which won't grow to replace the big ones when they get old, and later flowering trees like elder which would have continued the blossom into June.

These hedges are cut more or less every year, straight across the tops, so never flower and fruit. Trees like this need a couple of years to come back into flower after being cut. That's why farmers should only cut any piece of hedge every three years.

I know road safety means they will sometimes want to cut along the face of the hedge, which is fine. The Canal and River Trust do that along the canal hedges but leave them growing and flowering at the top. It works.

I really thought the hedge on the left-hand side going up wasn't going to be cut this winter and was looking forward to seeing it blossom, but they came and did it a couple of days before the deadline on 1 March.

However, further up this side isn't as bad as the right side and the hedge tops are grown properly. So you should see some hawthorn blossom on the left towards the top. Insects love it so look out for bees, wasps and butterflies.

If you look at the bottom of the hedges you will see that most were old laid hedges. It's on the next layer down, on the verges, you'll see the

Hawthorn blossom: Find clusters of white flowers.

Wood anemones: Fragile flowers found on Scarfield Hill.

Young oak leaves: Below a bright blue sky.

proof that the hedges are remnants of old woodland. That is, if you get to them before the mowers do.

In spring the first thing you notice is wood anemones, quite large fragile white flowers on feathery leaves. They used to be called windflowers and you can see why. They're on the left-hand side and then further up on the right as well. They're a good marker of old woodland, remaining long after the woods have gone and only spreading very gradually.

Next you'll see bluebells, especially on the right-hand side further up. Bluebells are a British flower that used to be common but are now increasingly rare. They grow in old established woodland and places where this used to be. They attract insects and are one of the first native flowers in the year to have a strong perfume, released in the sun. They are in danger now not just from loss of habitat but from the garden flower the Spanish bluebell, which can interbreed with them and wipe them out.

All the way up are patches of the strong green plant called dog's mercury which has been flowering since early March. It's something you probably don't notice, but another

Bracken: A relic of old woodland.

mark of old woodland. In a few places on the right, you will also find yellow archangel, another old woodland flower. This looks like the more common white deadnettle but had lovely yellow flowers.

Unfortunately, these too are in danger from a garden plant with similar but larger yellow flowers and variegated leaves, which spreads strongly in woodland and takes out a lot of native flowers.

Another sign of old woodland is the patches of ferns and bracken along this roadside. Some ferns like hart's tongue fern especially grow in this habitat. Bracken grows both in

Cow parsley: Spot in hedgerows.

old woodland and open heathland, but around here is mostly a relic of woodland. These non-flowering plants survive well in the darker habitat under trees.

As well as woodland flowers, you will find the common flowers of all hedgerows. These include red campion, a pink flower loved by insects, and big patches of stitchwort, a pretty white flower with fine leaves which often grows with bluebells. One of

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its old names is bachelors' buttons, because it made a cheap button-hole corsage. There's also lots of cow parsley, one of our most common and beautiful flowers, forget me nots, and probably still some celandines, primroses and garlic mustard.

So long as they are unmown, these verges and banks are a wonderful habitat for a wide variety of insects in their egg, larval and adult stages. You will see and hear plenty of birds about. In the sun you should see butterflies. Because they are used to growing under trees, most of these flowers finish before the summer, and the banks may not be so flowery later even if unmown. But you will at least see bramble flowers, honeysuckle and dog roses in the summer, hedgerow climbing plants all of which maintain the pollen corridor.

To continue the walk, you can either turn right into Foxhill Lane or left along Cobley Hill a bit further along. Foxhill Lane continues the pattern of old woodland and at the far end reaches the patch of ancient woodland on Cooper's Hill.

Parts of the lane are full of bluebells and later of bracken, wood sage and foxgloves. Some of the hedges, especially further along on the left, are remnants of really old laid hedges of oak and holly predominantly. These are now flailed so severely there is no blossom. But there are lovely free-standing trees including old oaks.

On the right past Foxhill barns is a good slightly younger double hedge, not so severely cut and having a good mix of oak, holly, hazel, hawthorn, blackthorn and field maple.

Around the barn conversions here there are often swallows in May, their nesting time, and buzzards nest in the fields nearby.

Cobley Hill doesn't have so much ecological interest as the hedges are mostly flail cut and especially so at the far end round Cobley Hill Farm. But in May there are good common flowers by the roadside here too, with cow parsley, stitchwort and later buttercups.

Coming back down Scarfield Hill is probably even nicer than walking up it, as the views are lovely, but if you want to go further you can return via Coopers Hill from Foxhill Lane, or come back down Grange Lane from Cobley Hill. These road walks are a good option when the weather is wet and the field paths are muddy.

By the time you get this you will have been to Peck Wood to see the bluebells, or missed it. But it's coming up to the best time to see Eades meadow if you want to see something special a little way outside the *Village* patch. Look out for my biodiversity walks in May too.

■ **Here's a poem (right) I wrote last autumn for the Withybed Poets.**

Spot them in April and early May: Wild bluebells.

Stuff

I'm not one for Black Friday goods. Never owned a dishwasher
No microwave, no smart phone, basic free-view television.
Some of my furniture came from a skip. No diamond rings.
But, oh dear. My house is so full up with stuff.
Nothing worth anything on my insurance
But each a memory or beauty made by hands.
I even love the house itself: the warmth of brick
The mellowed wooden doors in winter sun
The blackened beams that link me with my neighbours.
That plate there, that was my mum's, and she is next to it
Framed in a 1930 photograph, fragile as light.
She made those two embroideries, one of the farm
And one of me under the apple tree. And next to that
Another apple tree, painted by a friend long gone
Lit by the same sunlight as my garden apple.
Another tree grows here, now a carved bowl
Made by the man who delivers my parcels:
Around it, African pottery and a bowl of shells
Things that survived my suitcases to keep alive
Connections with the places I have been.
I can't declutter. Everything brings back a face, a touch
The smell of a place, of choices I have made.
My many lives are still with me. As I get older
My early selves embed themselves deep in me
With all those that they loved, and the lost ones,
Making my story, which is still being written.
This stuff stays with me, helping me to hold
My crowded, fragile, beautiful long road.

Celebrating 25 years: Peter and Lyn at the entrance of Hopwood Garden Centre.

A BLOOMING, BUSY TWENTY FIVE YEARS

HOPWOOD Garden Centre say it best themselves: they're not a big garden centre with lots of staff, they're a family, and when you visit the garden centre and nurseries you'll find Peter and Lyn, who are always happy to chat to their visitors about what they're looking for, and to advise on any questions they might have.

Peter and Lyn Joannides took over Hopwood Garden Centre on Ash Lane, 25 years ago, from Lyn's parents and brother who had been running a somewhat different version of the garden centre, which had at one point been predominantly wholesale.

They admit that gardening and plants hadn't always

continues overleaf

Hopwood Garden Centre, a family-owned nursery run by Peter and Lyn Joannides, celebrates its 25-year anniversary. They tell **Francesca Peach** what they've learned in that time, the challenges of running a family business and the successes they've shared over the years.

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been a lifelong passion, but something they have grown to love, and it's evident that they are exceptionally knowledgable about all the flowers, trees and vegetable plants that they stock.

They're a team who cover all ground between them. "We've both got our strengths and weaknesses" says Lyn "I don't know a lot about trees, like Peter, but I know more about vegetables and baskets."

Hopwood Garden Centre has featured a number of times in *The Village* magazine, over the past 25 years, and this time we spoke again with Peter and Lyn to find out how their business has evolved, and what villagers can expect this year.

Over their 25 year ownership they have made plenty of changes, taken some risks and had great ideas.

One of the changes the garden centre has seen, has been the way in which people shop. "We've found a niche for what people want now, because there are far more new-build houses around, and much smaller gardens, they want trees that only grow to about three metres, and are easy to look after" Peter said.

"Whereas we used to sell big trees, that were for big gardens. If people ask for big trees now, we have to order them in specially.

"Because the gardens have got smaller, people are looking more at plants, and more maintenance-free plants. People buy a lot of perennials, something they can plant once that come back year on year."

It's well known that business blossomed for garden centres during the Covid lockdown in 2020.

Hopwood Garden Centre was no different, and Peter and Lyn rose to the challenge of adapting their business in order to remain open.

The garden centre itself remained closed for many months during the pandemic, but only a short time into lockdown – after an initial "what are we going to do?" moment – with the help of their adult children Hannah and Jake (who also work closely with gardening and the outdoors), Peter and Lyn set up an online shop.

10 years and smiling: Peter and Lyn celebrate 10 years in 2008.

Flitting in: The robin is a regular visitor at Hopwood Garden Centre.

Blooming: A camelia flowers in the garden centre.

In the greenhouse: Potting plants getting ready for spring.

Hannah helped to catalogue thousands of different types of plants, and they set up a website where villagers could order plants which would be delivered to them that same day, or the next – as many villagers may remember, the Hopwood Garden Centre van made many doorstop drops every day across Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Rowney Green and beyond.

It was a huge success, and Peter and Lyn worked tirelessly, with many early starts and late nights to make sure that villagers were able to continue to enjoy their gardens, during a difficult time.

"People are still buying fruit and veg plants," Lyn said, on the trends they'd seen in recent years. "We saw a big increase in people growing their own food during the pandemic but even now there are always scares in the news about shortages, so people are growing their own, and we like seeing children get involved in growing things."

As any keen gardener knows, the weather dictates the availability

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of what garden centres are able to grow and sell. The fluctuating and extreme weather the UK has experienced in the last year – a scorching summer in 2022, followed by very cold spells and a lot of rain in late 2022 and early 2023 – has meant some popular plants like cordylines haven't grown well at all.

Last summer's heat has meant that some plants grew so much they were able to sell them at a much larger size than they would be in an "average" year.

Peter took me to the large greenhouse, where Lyn puts together villagers' hanging baskets, and where many of the cutting plants are potted and left to grow bigger, ready for customers to buy for the upcoming spring and summer.

When asked what their next plans are, the two replied that the garden centre will be working on hanging basket orders in the coming weeks, and during spring will be open seven days a week to help villagers prepare their gardens for summer.

In 2008, Peter once quipped, with a grin: "Ten years of living and working together, and we're still smiling!"

Fifteen years on from then, Peter and Lyn are still working hard, still living together and still smiling!

Surrounded by blooms: Lyn is pictured in the June/July 2000 issue of *The Village*, surrounded by some of the hundreds of hanging baskets she had pieced together that year.

HANGING BASKETS AT HOPWOOD

How do you grow a beautiful hanging basket?

Somewhat naively, The Village thought you went to a garden centre and bought a new one every year.

This isn't actually quite accurate. Peter and Lyn explained that customers can bring their baskets to Hopwood Garden Centre, leave them with them, where they will plant them up with a variety of brightly coloured, fresh plants, to be collected a week or two later. Shortly after this, they should flower and continue to bloom (provided they are well looked after) for the weeks and months to come. Much more sustainable than buying a new basket every year, and will look beautifully crafted, thanks to the experienced hands of Lynn. April and May are a great time to order a basket, for flowers that will blossom into the summer months.

Where the magic happens: The greenhouse where beautiful baskets are made and the potting is done.

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EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA is presenting AN EVENING OF JAZZ in the Ark, Alvechurch at 7.30pm on 20 May. A relaxed informal evening with 'SAUCE CITY JAZZ', a traditional 'Dixieland' jazz band. Tickets are £10 and available online at midlandsinfonia.co.uk or from Gin & Pickles or The Lounge, in The Square, Alvechurch (on the door if available card/cash). Doors and bar open at 7pm. www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy and jazz nights. The next event will be Sweet and Hot with Jeff & Anne Barnhart, "Spats" Langham & Graham Smith, on 24 May. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.

THE BIG HELP OUT will be held on Monday 8 May between 10.30am-12.30pm. To mark the Coronation of King Charles III, organisations are coming together to help out in the community. To take part, you can help clean up the Lickey Hills Country Park. Meet on the top of Rednall Hill and help to clean up litter and broken glass which could lead to more wildfires.

PICNIC IN THE PARK returns to The Meadows, Alvechurch for the 11th year on Sunday 28 May. The dog show will kick off at 10.30am with the official opening at 12pm. The event will run until 4.30pm where visitors can then pack up and go to Alvechurch Cricket Club for afternoon and evening events. See our Picnic in the Park feature for more details.

MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book them, see their website: www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They have several bank holidays off in May but will be meeting on 15 and 22 May in the Village Hall and performing at the Picnic in the Park on 28 May

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA
Save the date of their Summer concert which will be on Sunday 25 June.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical music along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

WHAT'S ON GUIDE

TURNED OUT NICELY

ON 6 April, Burcot Woodturners celebrated the club's 25th Anniversary since first being affiliated to the AWGB (Associaton of Woodturners of Great Britain).

The evening was attended by over 50 members and guests, including representatives from the AWGB, to help celebrate the milestone.

Formed by professional woodturner Richard Barnes in 1997 at Burcot Forge, the club was officially affiliated to the AWGB in April 1998. Shortly after, it moved it's meetings to Burcot Village Hall, which has been it's home ever since.

During the meeting, members had the use of a club lathe and the club pole lathe, to practice their turning skills on and learn new techniques. There was an extensive display of members work, along with a slide show of photographs from the history of the club, which ran throughout the evening. Members had the opportunity to have a go at a technical competition, which involved changing the jaws on chuck , there was a sale of tools, and the usual club raffle.

The club ethos of 'a cuppa, a biscuit, and a chat' was, for one night, replaced by 'a cuppa, a slice of cake, and the sharing of stories from the last 25 years'. Club President, John Smith, thanked everyone for coming and said that it was a fantastic evening for the club to mark it's 25th anniversary. He added that he was proud that the club was going from strength to strength, with more new members and a new website along with social media pages.

Burcot Woodturners is a friendly club and welcomes anyone who has an interest in woodturning to our meetings, whether they are just starting out in the hobby, novices, or are experienced turners, everyone is welcome.

The club meets on the first Thursday of each month at Burcot Village Hall at 7.15pm. You can find out more information about the club from it's website: www.burcotwoodturners.com.

Or follow their social media for more: Instagram: @burcotwoodturners and Facebook: www.facebook.co.uk/burcotturners

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL AGM

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL committee invites anyone with an interest in the hall to join in at their AGM on Wednesday 17th May.

"Everyone's welcome: come and meet, speak and have a cuppa with us, get an idea what we do and what new projects we are undertaking," said a spokesman.

"Have you got what it takes to be part of the running the hall, whether having an active role or just would like to add your opinions? we need fresh members and fresh ideas? Do pop along, we are a friendly bunch!"

For more info, call 0770 6383 099 or 0121 445 4022

HOPWOOD JUNCTION

The band Hopwood Junction will be performing as part of the Coronation of King Charles III celebrations at Rowney Green Village Hall on Friday 5 May at 8pm. All are welcome to come along and enjoy the music.

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. Face to face groups have now resumed, meeting on Wednesdays 2-3pm at Longbridge Retirement Village and Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs weekly sessions for young brass, wind, and string instrument players to enjoy being part of a group who rehearse and perform together. New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm. Individual instrumental and vocal lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurch-frenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry.
They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day.
No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group! Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Extra safety measures are in place. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

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BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS warmly invite everyone to the Friends Meeting House on Sandhills Road. Parking is available on site, and there is access for the disabled. We hope you will visit us to meet old and new friends for a chat and a (free!) cup of tea or coffee. It does us all good just to get out of our homes for a short time now and then. Covid has meant that creating friendships and making social contacts has become more important to all of us, and the Meeting House is a pleasant, quiet and comfortable place where you can meet other people.
A series of film showings will be held at the Friends Meeting house this year, the next of which will be on
The Barnt Green & Redditch Quakers invite you to a series of study groups around Deeper Meaning in the Miracles. They will be held at the Friends Meeting House, on Wednesdays from 7.30-9pm. The first, on the 10 May will be 'Introduction & The Healing of the Leper', followed by 'The Feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000' on the 24 May.
They will also be holding 'The Quaker Service Memorial Exhibition', which will be displayed at the Friends Meeting House on Friday 9 June 10.30am-6pm and Saturday 10 June 2-6pm, admission is free.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. You can now find one of these hubs in Alvechurch. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, however you may find these in many different places such as community centres or libraries, and all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood.
Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall. Entry is £1 for members and £2 for guests, including a drink and biscuit.
A canal trip to Hopwood on back has been organised for 20 May, times to be advised, from 10am onwards. The event will be ticketed, so please contact AVS for more information.
AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martinclarke1@btinternet.com
An evening of fun and games with fish and chips will be held on Sunday 17th June at 7pm, this will be a ticketed event with more information to follow.

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves.
They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be very pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community.
If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects.
The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre.
If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

MIDLAND Ancestors meet monthly at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre (19 Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, B60 1AS). More info at: www.bromsgrovebmsgh.co.uk

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 3rd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month. There is usually a guest speaker.
They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity.
Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or look on Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. Please email contact@wbdcs.org.uk for further information. Meetings start at 7.45pm. Non-members are always welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month at Alvechurch Cricket Club at 1.30pm, and offers the chance to make new friends, meet old ones and enjoy talks, demos and visits.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12noon at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides regular opportunities for retired professionals and businessmen to meet socially and share common interests. A members' meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Weds each month, 10am–12noon, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. For more info visit www.bromsgroveprobus.co.uk or contact Jim on 01527 833531 bromsgrove1982probus.weebley.com

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment.
They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker.
Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit the website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

BIODIVERSITY WALKS

MARY Green's next walk to look at biodiverse habitat round Alvechurch is on Tuesday 16 May, repeated on Friday 19 May. Meet on either day at 10.30 at The Crown, Withybed Green – no need to book.
The walk takes about 2 hours and is gentle and slow, though it might be muddy if wet and there may be stiles.
For more information contact alvbiodiv@gmail.com

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather condi-

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tions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com

The next walk will be a walk around Inberrow & Abbott's Morton on 7 May at 2pm, led by Mariea & Martin Clarke, who you can contact on: 07752 918977. Meet at St Peters Church Car Park, Inkberrow, WR7 4EU.

The following walk will be held on 4 June at 2pm, led by Gerard Nash around Tardebigge New Wharf and canal locks. Meet at Tardebigge Village car park on Church Lane, B60 3AH. Contact 0121 445 4454 for more information.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

RELAXATION & MEDITATION for Everyone. Short, welcoming & inclusive classes with an experienced teacher at The Ark, Alvechurch, and online. An experiential approach to relaxation and meditation for a calm, clear mind and relaxed, balanced outlook. For more information, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085.

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.

Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.

Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park.

Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.

Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).

Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.

Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground.

Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus). Irrespective of age, lifestyle, health and ability, we could all benefit from listening to our bodies: tuning in to our needs, building connections throughout the body, focusing on detail; challenging what is strong, building what is weaker, balancing the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Book a 1:1 apparatus session (Barnt Green) or a mat class (Rowney Green). Call 07759 590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

COMMUNITY Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Baptist Church, run by Bromsgrove council: Active Seniors on Tues 9.30–10.30am. and Zumba Gold on Thurs 1–2pm (each £3.50 per session). Fully-qualified, insured instructors on hand to help. For more info, call 01527 881289 or visit at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/active-bromsgrove

YOGA for Every-Body. Friendly & Inclusive classes in Blackwell, Alvechurch and online with an experienced teacher. A slow but powerful approach to yoga, which encourages free, natural alignment of the body, whilst building strength, flexibility and relaxed awareness. Contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903663085.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm. Call Nikki for more information: 0778814817

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS sessions to help you relax, find your inner peace, and elevate your life every Wednesday evening 7pm-9.15pm, starting 24 May at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Suitable for everyone. Please contact Coz for more info & to book on 07770067349, Facebook – MeditationWithCoz, www.meditationwithcoz.com

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 8 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people. A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

ROWNEY GREEN PRE-SCHOOL offers learning through play for children from two years to

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SILVER THREADS RIDE BACK IN TIME

THE SILVER THREADS GROUP enjoyed a day out to Wythall Transport Museum in April. The group was picked up from Alvechurch by a vintage bus and given a guided tour around the many interesting exhibits, by knowledgeable volunteers.

The museum is staffed entirely by enthusiastic volunteers and all of the money raised from visitors goes towards preserving vehicles from our social history, to be enjoyed for generations to come.

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school age, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm, term-time only. Call 07522 926286 or see Facebook.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

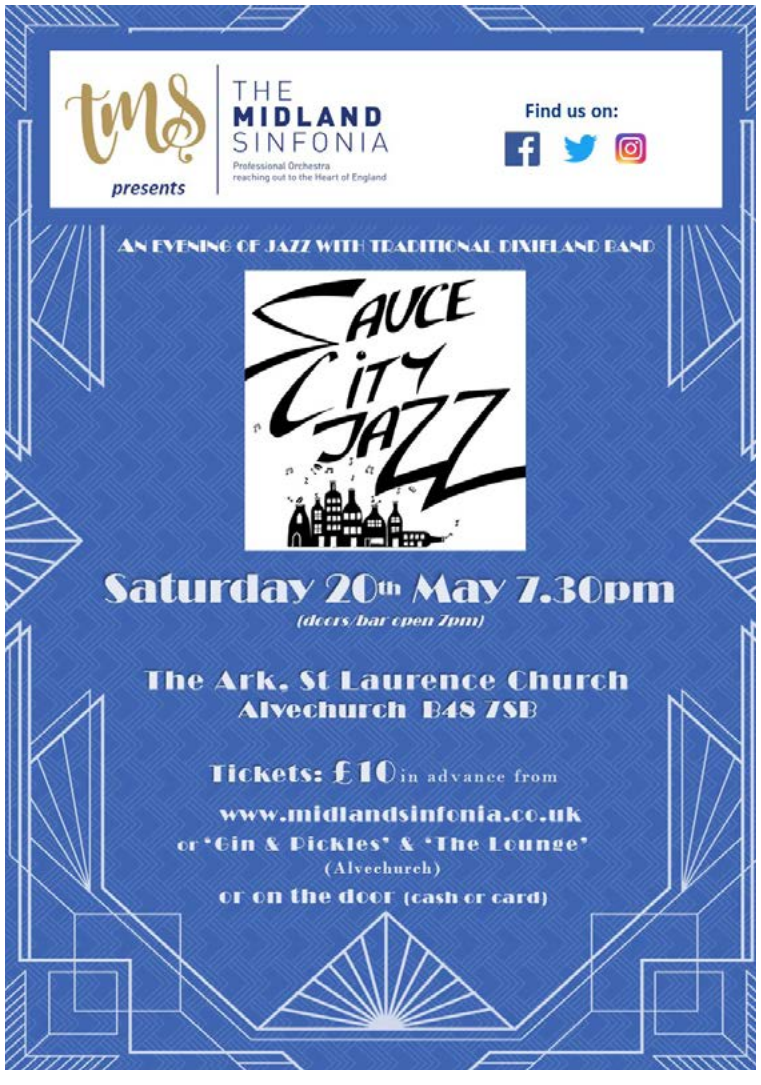
NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG.
Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250



SPADESBOURNE Bridge Club plays at Amphlett Hall, Crown Close, Bromsgrove B61 8DW. Join the group for friendly bridge in a pleasant venue on Thurs evenings, 7pm for a 7.15 start. Table money for visitors is £3. Details from Jan on 01905 772256.

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House would like to welcome a few new members – for more info contact the organiser, Des Clarke, on 0121 453 3034.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY. We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon and would like new members – contact Liz on 07538 092296.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request" as they will be doing in the Picnic in the Park on 28 May. For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroftarts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the last Tues of the month from 2pm–3.30pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide HQ in Blackwell Road, Barnt Green. Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon sessions. Workshops with visiting tutors during each term. There is a waiting list, but enquiries from improvers and intermediate artists welcomed. Jackie: 0121 445 4745.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm.
On Thursday, 11 May, Darren Rudge will be the guest speaker and his subject is "Producing Your Perfect Hanging Basket, Patio Pot or Window Box". Darren has spent over 30 years in the Horticultural industry and uses his broad knowledge to give advice and help others create their ideal garden space.
Darren was awarded the Beatrice Eckstein Award for best newcomer to the horticultural industry and was initially employed as Head Gardener for a large private garden in Wolverhampton. His career continued as an assistant at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens, a professional associate with the RHS, a judge and garden expert seen at national horticultural shows and Present of the Tettenhall and District Horticultural Society. Darren now runs his own consultancy in landscape, planting and garden design as well as giving talks to gardening groups and societies. In addition to all this he is also the permanent gardening expert for BBC West Midlands and BBC Coventry and Warwickshire.
Guests are always welcome £3.50 include coffee and biscuits. For more information please contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, meets on the fourth Thursday of the month. They next meet on Thursday 25 May, when Virginia Davis will be demonstrating, and will be recounting some of her amusing tales. The meeting starts at 7.30pm, and the cost for visitors is £5, which includes refreshments. There will also be a raffle, where one of the beautiful arrangements can be won for a £1 raffle ticket. For more info contact Felicity on 07812 336263.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about.
Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community.
No previous experience is necessary and full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcrosswi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Mariea Clarke clarke.mariea@gmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, Whetty Lane, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Anyone can just drop in on either night. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalve-church.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The large bright hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

The deadline for submissions to the What's On section in the upcoming June issue of *The Village* is 6 May 2023. Please email: info@villageonline.co.uk for more information or to feature in the listings.

ALVECHURCH FC youth team members Koby Thomas, aged ten, (above, left) and Owen Jordan lift the FA Cup after being told they are to walk out at Wembley stadium as mascots in front of tens of thousands of fans at the cup final.

Koby, who was diagnosed with leukaemia during the teams' pre-season and is making strong progress, has continued his support of the club by attending some training sessions with his team. This show of strength earned him the nomination to be a mascot at the cup final alongside his best friend Owen. The pair can be seen above during the surprise announcement at Lye Meadow with (from left) Alvechurch FC sporting director Mark Fogarty, youth manager Bryan Allcott and club captain (and Koby's favourite player) Ash Carter.

It's been quite a season!

As the season draws to a close, it's been another memorable year for the Alvechurch FC, *writes Trevor Ball*.

For a village club punching above its weight playing at step three in the non-league pyramid, to finish mid table while going on some great cup runs is quite an achievement.

The highlight was reaching the second round of the FA Cup, beating Cheltenham Town with more than 1,500 supporters following the Church and then joining more than 1,000 at Forest Green. These are memories to last a lifetime.

The club then got back to work to play catch-up in the league, while still managing to reach the Birmingham Senior Cup semi-final against a strong Coventry City Under-21 side at the Coventry Building Society Arena.

This success has seen league attendances increase by 14.5 per cent, and now average more than 300 for the first time.

All of this success wouldn't be possible without the hard work of the directors, management team, players, volunteers, sponsors, and the continued following of the dedicated supporters who follow this great club.

Season Stats

Played 53, Won 25, Drawn 8, Lost 20.
Average goals For 1.8 Against 1.6.
Appearances: Jed Abbey 51; Ash Carter 48; Danny Waldron 48.
Top Scorers: Danny Waldron 25; Jed Abbey 19; Tyrell Sheen Hamilton 11.

Final four again

ALVECHURCH FC came close to forcing another penalty shoot-out against Coventry City Under-21s in the Birmingham Senior Cup semi-final, despite falling three down.

Every round in this season's competition had seen Church go through on penalties and they came close to doing it again after launching a comeback in the last 20 minutes.

Two quick goals after half time had taken Coventry's score to 3-0 and it looked all over for Church, but goals on 73 and 89 minutes for the visitors gave added spice to the seven minutes of stoppage time as Church fought for the equaliser.

But another penalty shoot-out was not to be. If only . . .

Tepid local derby

WITH AN EYE on the match against Coventry 48 hours later, Alvechurch FC made nine changes to the previous starting 11 for the league match against Redditch United.

They held out until the last quarter when a Redditch goal on 76 minutes from a set piece cross and header from close range settled the match in probably the only way either goal was to be breached in a rather tepid local derby.

Under-18 player Georgie Manning made his debut in a reshuffled defence and did himself proud, with his defensive partner Harry Williams putting in a star performance.

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